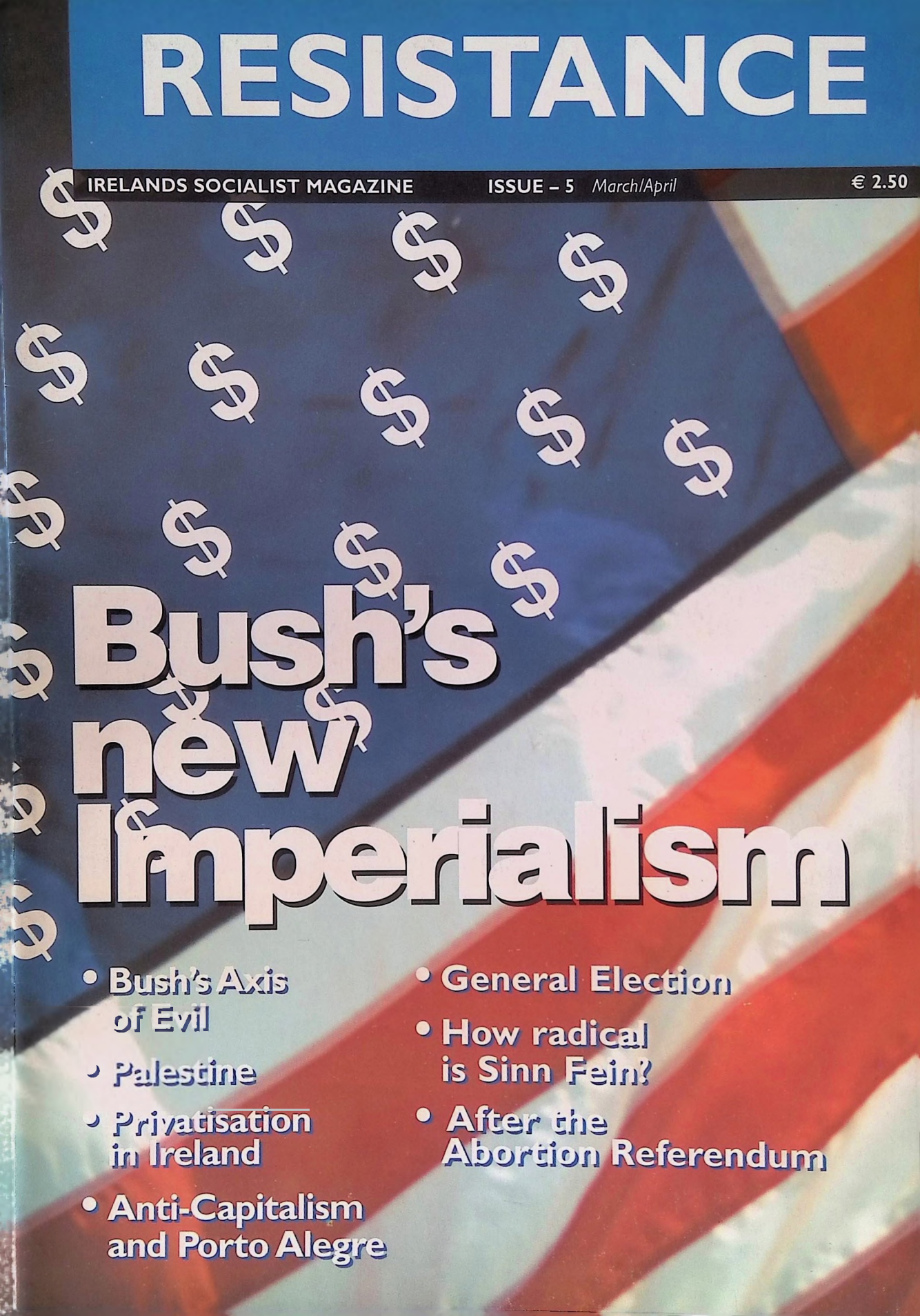


RESISTANCE

IRELANDS SOCIALIST MAGAZINE

ISSUE - 5 March/April

€ 2.50



Bush's new Imperialism

- Bush's Axis of Evil
- Palestine
- Privatisation in Ireland
- Anti-Capitalism and Porto Alegre
- General Election
- How radical is Sinn Féin?
- After the Abortion Referendum

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

NOTES

Palestine, Abortion Referendum Result,
Zimbabwe, French Elections

FEATURES

Bush's Axis of Evil

Sinead Kennedy examines what is behind
the US's threat to take the war to Iraq

What is the role of the State?

Marnie Holborow looks at the state
in today's globalised world

Anti-Capitalism – still growing, still strong

The gathering at Porto Alegre and the
demonstrations in Barcelona are reported
on by Mike Gonzalez and Guy Miles

The Privatisation of Ireland

Deirdre Cronin surveys the rolling back
of Irish state sector

General Election

Colm O Riain looks at where the left vote
is in the forthcoming election in Northern Ireland

How Radical is Sinn Fein?

Kieran Allen

REGULARS

Ireland Uncovered

What is Lawlor up to?

Rod Fitzsimons investigates

Open to Debate

Is Cuba socialist?

Brian Kelly

Backchat

Eamonn McCann

REVIEWS

Film Review

War Films: Hollywood's attempts to
justify US wars in film

Books Review

Literature, Partition and the Nation State;
A History of Ulster; The Best Democracy Money
Can Buy; Rivers of Blood, Rivers of Gold, Europe's Conflict
with Tribal Peoples.

Resistance is the
bi-monthly magazine of
the Socialist Workers
Party (Ireland)
Editor: Marnie Holborow

Editorial Board: Richard
Boyd Barrett, Deirdre Cronin,
Rob Hurson, Sinead Kennedy,
Dave Lordan, Sean McVeigh,
Peadar O'Grady, Colm
O'Riain, Willie Cumming
Design & Layout:
Colm O'Riain

Circulation Manager:
Kevin Wingfield
Phone: 01 8722682
Fax: 01 8723838
Email: swp@club.ie
Subscription: one year
Ireland €15/stg£12
UK stg£15
Europe €20 USA \$20

NATIONAL DEMONSTRATION

JUSTICE FOR PALESTINE

NO WAR ON IRAQ

3.00PM Saturday 27th April

Garden of Remembrance

Parnell Square, Dublin

EDITORIAL

Bush's new imperialism

September 11 has turned out to be cover for a far wider agenda. The possible invasion of Iraq and the state terror against Palestinians unleashed by Israel, the US's satellite state in the Middle East, shows the brutal lengths to which the US is prepared to go to reassert its role in the world.

In the past many on the left took for granted that it was imperialism that drove the war aims of the Western powers. "Yankes out" shouted against US bloody involvement in Vietnam or Latin America summed up the understanding that the US military machine was the strong arm of their economic system – or imperialism. Talk about "the free world" from Nixon or from Reagan, was automatically dismissed as rhetoric which cloaked the cruder interests of American capitalism. As a result few people hesitated about which side they were on.

The new globalised post-cold war world has thrown many into disarray regarding these basics. One-time anti-Nato campaigner Pronias de Rossa and other former anti-imperialists here have gone along with the war. Even some of the new radicals in the anti-capitalist movement like Susan George in France, their heads turned by the war on terror, have drawn back from taking a stand against the US and joined the clamour to "weed out" the terrorists. The US is ramming through its domination to suppress opposition and to warn off potential rivals. With US military spending now totalling more than nine times that of next big military spenders and with US forces in no less than 130 countries worldwide, the new imperialism of the US is there for all to see.

Recognising this is not only stating the obvious as regards US power. It also points the way to how it can be defeated. First, it allows no equivocation about US power being the main threat, even when those opposing American imperialism seem more undemocratic still. In the Vietnam war, Ho Chi Minn's record in the ruthless suppression of opposition did not stop anti-imperialists from wanting to see the US defeated. Today we should not be deflected by US rhetoric about terrorists or Saddam Hussein.

Palestine

The Israeli army launched an all-out invasion of the Palestinian neighbourhoods in the Occupied Territories at the end of March. US-made Apache attack helicopters flew overhead firing on cities. Israeli bulldozers demolished buildings, tore up roads and established permanent positions for the tanks throughout residential areas. Yasser Arafat's HQ has been under siege. For months, Arafat has not been allowed to leave the compound, even to attend the Arab summit in Beirut.

Using the pretext of the "War on Terrorism" and suicide bombing by desperate Palestinian youth, Israel has instigated its own reign of terror. Troops have broken-in doors in house to house searches and rounded up men of military age. There were reports that many were summarily executed, others simply disappeared.

One fifteen year old in one of the refugee camps recounted:

"The Israeli soldiers came around demanding that all men between the ages of 16 and 45, report to the boys school."

"I'm only 15, but I have an ID card, so I didn't want to take a chance. So I went to the school. The soldiers were taking us in one by one."

"They forced us to strip down to our underwear for searches. Then we were asked questions about who the activists in the camp were. We were put in the schoolyard with our hands tied above our heads. I was there from 11am until about 7pm."

"I felt like I was going to pass out. I had pleaded with the soldiers earlier, telling them that I was just a child and couldn't take this, but they didn't listen. When I finally broke down, one soldier told me that I could go home. Just me. The rest stayed and I don't know what happened to them. There were about 300 of us."

No one has been arrested for the targeted killing of almost 100 Palestinians or been jailed for the killing of more than 120 Palestinian paramedics as Israeli forces fire on ambulances with impunity.

Secondly, imperialist states often go to war when their own dominance is under threat. World War One broke out when crumbling empires were at the weakest and new powers vied for dominance. World War Two was about rivalry and redividing the world, ultimately between the US and the USSR. Modern day imperialism is also about the heat of competition, which means that US power is not as unassailable as it might seem.

The US economy is not as strong as it was in the 60's after the post-war boom. It has been on the edge of recession, seen its industrial base rivalled in Europe and in Japan. China alone produces more steel in the World market than the US. To add insult to injury, even US security at home is not immune from attack.

That is why Bush, for all his bravura, is vulnerable. The US administration is desperate for the support coalition from other states. If anti-war movements develop outside the US they can seriously undermine the US's ability to pursue its war aims. Blair's support for Bush has come sharply up against a stronger anti-war feeling in Britain. And Ahern's rush to ally himself with Bush along with FF's commitment to further militarisation of the EU, may well hit the same raw nerve that the Nice referendum did. The escalation of Israel's war on the West Bank, with US connivance, has already met with widespread opposition and may well become the straw that breaks the camel's back as regards Bush's phoney war on terrorism. Anti-war and Justice for Palestine demonstrations are attracting huge support.

The anti-capitalist movement has shown that sometimes broader political issues can crystallise and give focus to resistance at home. Anti-capitalist protests in Genoa last year re-invigorated opposition to Berlusconi. Barcelona protests against the EU summit stiffened the Spanish trade union movement's resolve against Azanar's policies. The anti war movement here it too can feed into and overlap with the existing discontent with the overall right wing agenda of this government.

Meanwhile Bush has backed Israel to the hilt in its assault on the Occupied Territories. However at an international level pressure is beginning to build to restrain Sharon. As thousands take to the streets throughout the Middle East, in many European cities and on a smaller scale in the US itself, as we go to press, some way is sought to avoid huge potential unrest and destabilisation.

Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah's "peace plan", a watered-down version of UN Security Council Resolution 242 which demanded Israeli withdrawal from Arab territory captured in the 1967 Middle East war, has been proposed by Arab leaders as a possible basis for returning to negotiations. The US has always supported Israel's refusal to implement 242.

The Saudi plan would entail a "Bantustan" Palestinian statelet entirely dependent on Israel, split down the middle by Israeli "settlements" with an enlarged Jerusalem controlled by Israel. Arafat has indicated he would settle for such a compromise, as he did with the Oslo accords agreed at Camp David in the US a decade ago. But crucially there is no solution for the Palestinian refugees concentrated in squalid camps in the West Bank, and in Lebanon. These families were driven from their villages, farms and homes over the last fifty years by Israeli "ethnic cleansing". All Israeli politicians refuse to entertain the idea that these desperate people might return to their homes. Such an influx would destroy the racial nature of Israel as a Jewish state.

The Israeli State has been dependent from the beginning on massive aid from the US – it is the largest recipient of US aid. Those billions are only given so the West and the Western multinationals can dominate the region and maintain control of Middle East oil. Socialists argue that there can be no "two state" solution. What is needed is a secular state in Palestine where Jews and Arabs can live together with equal rights and without racial discrimination.

Kevin Wingfield

Abortion Referendum Result: NO MEANS NO

By Peadar O'Grady

The rejection of the FF/DP government's proposal to practically ban abortion and to impose a prison sentence of up to 12 years on women and health workers is a clear and unprecedented defeat for the two traditional superpowers in Irish society – Fianna Fail and the Catholic Church (and their 'pro-life' foot soldiers). Despite attempts by the tiny 'Dana Brigade' of hardliners, assisted by the usual plethora of wide-eyed media pundits, to interpret it as a victory for the right, the campaign and its aftermath have opened up a real debate on women's rights. The debate is encompassing the issues of what Americans would call 'Birth Control' (i.e. sex education, contraception and abortion). The question of 'what now?' is on everyone's lips.

In Ireland the collaboration between church and state culminated in control over health, education and welfare being yielded to the Catholic Church. This meant that Catholic teaching on birth control dominated and was enforced and policed by priests. The social foundations of church policy in Ireland originated in the nineteenth century efforts of the Catholic Church to promote a Catholic middle class by preventing the break up of Catholic owned farms. Sex outside marriage was thus discouraged, single parenthood and divorce were viewed as sinful, and marriage without property was ill advised. Celibacy was made a virtue and emigration was tacitly encouraged.

The development of scientific approaches to sex education and the improvement in the effectiveness and availability of contraception and abortion services, as well as more liberal attitudes to divorce and single parenthood, has increasingly posed a fundamental threat to the power and role of the church. The exposure of the abuses arising from the more brutal tactics of forcing single mothers into institutions like the Magdalene Laundries, and the sexual, physical and emotional abuse and even sale of the children involved through church run children's homes, schools and adoption agencies has further undermined church authority.

Trends such as the rapid and recent movement in Ireland of workers from rural to urban areas and the massive increase in the involvement of women in the workplace are commonly cited as social pressures leading to demands for birth control. Lack of equality in pay and conditions and the gross inadequacy of decent childcare along with the absence of cheap restaurant and laundry facilities has meant that increased participation in the workforce for women is a double edged sword. Women experience the benefits of workplace involvement but without the release from domestic duties or the wages sufficient to pay for them. A clear class divide between rich and poor women is becoming ever more evident as a result.

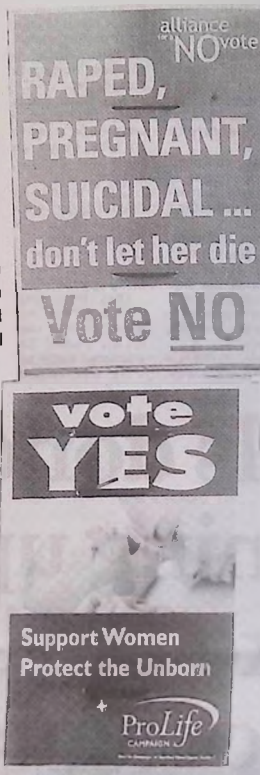
The Pro Choice position of supporting a woman's right to choose contraception and abortion or to have a child requires both of these choices to be resourced adequately. The defensive position of the Alliance for a No Vote (ANV) reflected both the opportunist desire of the Labour Party leadership to form coalitions with the political right wing and their fear and overestimation of the anti-choice constituency. As a result clear pro-choice arguments were discouraged within the ANV and the arguments about resources

and class were suppressed. Despite this, a clear majority consensus for abortion (71% in IMS poll and 66% in Irish Times/MRBI poll) in circumstances of suicidal feelings, rape or incest and severe foetal abnormality emerged before the vote from popular discussion (including the significant interventions of women like Deirdre de Barra who was pregnant with a severely malformed foetus) and the efforts of small numbers of pro-choice activists and left wing groups.

A clear breach was also evident in the traditionally right-wing consensus of the medical profession. Ten consultant psychiatrists calling for a No vote immediately countered the call for a Yes vote by psychiatrists Patricia Casey and Anthony Clare. Twenty-five consultant obstetricians contradicted the Masters of the three main maternity hospitals. Fifty General Practitioners signed a Doctors for Choice petition published in the medical press calling for a No vote and the introduction of abortion services. The anti-abortion doctors declared their lack of confidence in the Medical Council holding the pro-life line on abortion. The predominance of medical as opposed to moral arguments by the anti-choice groups reflected a retreat from a sole reliance on church authority but resulted in a failure of this new reliance on the secular authority of anti-choice medical doctors.

With nowhere left to turn, anti choice forces are for the time being crushed. If their future lies in turning to Christian fundamentalists like Dana or Christian Solidarity, their role is for the near future relegated to the margins of Irish Society.

The challenge for the left in Ireland is to press for urgent legislation following the line of the X case decision and to demand the resources to provide sex-education, non-directive counselling, contraception and abortion on a free, legal and therefore safe basis. It is mass working class action from below that will provide the best opportunity for such a victory. As Goretti Horgan puts it in the excellent pamphlet Abortion Why Irish Women must have the Right to Choose: "As long as the Irish economy puts profit before people such facilities will be provided insofar as they meet the needs of the economy not as a means towards the liberation of women. It follows that the fight for women's liberation is best expressed as part of the fight against capitalism."



Zimbabwe

Inflation in Zimbabwe is now running at 112%, over 70% of the population live under the poverty line, life expectancy has dropped to 37 years as AIDS takes its toll. The domestic debt is \$220 billion and external debt is at US\$700 million. Two people have already died of starvation in Hwange – northern Zimbabwe. Student and political activists are being victimised and killed. Forget what the mainstream media is saying about Zimbabwe. The fact is the people of Zimbabwe are not going to wait for another 6 years to cast a vote or rely on western sanctions to change the situation in Zimbabwe.

The problem of Zimbabwe is not only Mugabe but what he represents and the system he supervises, which puts profit before human needs.

Mugabe is today reaping the bitter harvest of the IMF/World Bank policies of the Economic Structural Adjust Program (ESAP). They were introduced in 1991 and were the beginning of hard times for many as trade liberalisation led to cheap labour and bosses getting more power to hire and fire at will with no laws protecting workers. Retrenchments were every day things. All the gains of independence were wiped away, as social spending was cut and publicly owned companies were privatised.

Workers reacted with an uprising which began with a massive two week civil servants strike in 1996. This was the beginning of spontaneous strikes against the government policies of ESAP. Between 1997 and 1998 there were more strikes and food riots mainly in townships. Peasants on their own invaded farms in Mashonaland West-Svosve area and were removed by the government. Farm workers also got organised shocking the country. The government's response was to introduce more and more oppressive laws. Soldiers, instead of protecting the country were used to police.

The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) was forced by the pressure on the ground to call a National Working People Convention in 1999, which later that year formed the Movement

for Democratic Change (MDC). The first executive was a coalition of all those forces which resisted ESAP and oppression. The middle class-led groups, churches, non governmental organisations and commercial farmers joined in. The common denominator was Mugabe because of his oppression and brutality, but the real issues which made the uprising – the fight against ESAP, privatisation, poverty – were set aside and demands for constitutional democracy came to the fore.

The issue of land then emerged with the war veterans leading it. Mugabe supported it for his political selfishness not for the benefit of the peasants.

The March elections were fought on the ground created by the struggles against ESAP. Mugabe used anti-imperialist rhetoric, the land issue, violence and intimidation to assure victory. The MDC however now have control at local government level of most major urban areas. Its failure to take a strong stance on the land issue and offer a way forward to the peasantry has been a weakness that Mugabe has been only too happy to exploit.

It is true that the election was stolen. But the anger of workers has to be focused. The way forward is to re-establish the traditions of 1997-1998. The workers managed to reverse the proposed taxes and won a 20% cost of living adjustment through self-activity stay aways. The proposed mass action by National Constitutional Assembly on 6 April should show the way. The demands should be broader than just the demand of a new constitution; bread and butter issues should be included as well.

The left in Zimbabwe has to expose the rhetoric of Mugabe and remove his anti-imperialist mask. The Mugabe regime must not be recognised so the government of national unity Beki is proposing must be rejected.

Luke Kasuwanga

French Elections

In a recent opinion poll 74 % of people thought there was little or no difference between the politics of the two principal candidates for the presidential elections in France, Jospin (the Socialist Party prime minister) and Chirac (the present right wing president). At about the same time one of the smaller centre right candidates created a wave of panic when he made a speech saying that "If we all think the same that means we've stopped thinking".

The apathy created by the similarity between Jospin and Chirac's programmes, which will probably lead to a record abstention on the first round election night (21st April), has been broken however by the amazing scores in the opinion polls for Arlette Laguiller, spokesperson for the Trotskyist organisation Lutte Ouvrière. She is credited at the moment with between 8 and 10 % of the vote. Her slogan is clearly socialist "Always for the workers" and her basic demands for a free and complete Social Security system, guaranteed full pensions for all, for making layoffs illegal and making public the secret accounting of the big multinationals, are finding a growing echo amongst working class and young voters. Arlette Laguiller's election meetings are also attracting the biggest crowds, from several hundred in small provincial towns to almost 3 000 in the first Parisian meeting on the 17th of March.

The official left is now under real pressure. Jospin, whose government privatised more companies than the two right wing governments between 1993 and 1997, has wheeled out the "left

wingers" of the Socialist Party and has started to talk about workers. The Communist Party candidate could only babble about the extremism of Arlette Laguiller and a vicious press campaign has started claiming that the "Bolshevik" Arlette Laguiller and the fascist "Le Pen" are both dangers to democracy.

But more and more working class people and youth are starting to see in Arlette Laguiller the best way of expressing the need for a left which breaks with the fatalism of the Socialist Party and the Communist Party. Jospin says he is for the "market economy" but against "market society", Arlette Laguiller stands clearly against both and this is striking a chord with millions of people.

In one sense the popularity of Lutte Ouvrière's candidate is the electoral expression of the anticapitalist movement in that once again people are saying in mass that we need an alternative which breaks from managing capitalism's affairs. Unfortunately Lutte Ouvrière does not address the anticapitalist movement, preferring to concentrate solely on factory and electoral work. But the debate, which has already begun, on the creation of a new Communist Party if the Lutte Ouvrière score is significantly bigger than that of the Communist Party candidate Robert Hue, is absolutely vital for all socialists and anticapitalists. The Arlette Laguiller vote will probably be at least two million. It is huge opportunity for all socialists in France to address far larger numbers of people on what sort of political alternative we need.

Nick Barrett (France)

Bush's Axis of Evil

By Sinead Kennedy

George W. Bush's 'axis of evil' speech to the US Congress in January confirmed what many people suspected, that the war against Afghanistan was only the beginning. In his speech, he claimed that the September 11 attacks justified his widening the "war on terror". Indeed the attacks on the World Trade Centre provided the perfect cover for moving plans to invade Iraq from the margins to the mainstream of political debate.

Assistant Secretary of Defence Paul Wolfowitz had stated months before the attacks that Iraq would be a target as soon as "we find the right way to do it". Within hours of the attacks the Pentagon's Defence Policy board - a group of hard line conservatives, from Henry Kissinger and James Schlesinger to Dan Quayle and Newt Gingrich - sent former CIA director James Woolsey off to Britain to gather evidence of a link between Osama bin Laden and Iraq.

When the U.S. military once again goes to war against Iraq, expanding the "war against terrorism" will be nothing more than a convenient excuse to justify it. Defence Policy board member Newt Gingrich candidly stated in Newsweek the real reasons why the U.S. would attack Iraq: "There's a feeling we've got to do something that counts-and bombing caves is not something that counts."

Why is the US taking on Iraq again? The official reasons are not very convincing. Firstly, there is no evidence to link Iraq to either the September 11 attack or the Al Qaeda. Woolsey's mission to construct a "legal case against Iraq" came up with very little. His claim that Mohammed Atta, one of the alleged September 11 hijackers, had met with Iraqi intelligence officials in Prague last year was later denied by the Czech officials who were Woolsey's main witnesses to the meeting.

Woolsey's intention, no matter what the evidence, is to up the ante militarily. Speaking in London, he said: "If the American government chooses, based on the information it has, to take military action against any other state outside of Afghanistan, I believe that the world will see our reaction in that case will be ruthless, relentless and devastating. In the American vernacular, you ain't seen nothing yet."

The other pretext put forward is the claim that Saddam Hussein possesses weapons of mass destruction (chemical, biological and nuclear). The major charge against Hussein is that he has used these weapons against his own people. But when Saddam Hussein was known to have used chemical weapons, the US and Europe remained silent.



Victim of Bush's Terror

Iraq launched chemical weapons attacks on Iranian troops in 1984. A few weeks later the US began supplying Saddam Hussein with satellite intelligence on Iranian troop deployments. In March 1988 the Iraqi military used poison gas to kill 5,000 villagers at Halabja as part of a drive to crush resistance by the Kurdish population in the north of the country. No government in the world condemned the atrocity, with the exception of Sweden, while Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz and Donald Rumsfeld, the leaders of the current drive for war, were all major figures in the US administration at the time. Not one of them uttered one word of condemnation against Hussein.

All evidence suggests that Iraq is incapable of producing "weapons of mass destruction". The UN inspectors agree that 95 percent of these weapons have been destroyed and the remaining 5 percent have been rendered unusable by the fact that Iraq is prevented under sanctions from replacing equipment needed to deploy them. Scott Ritter, who was until August 1998, the chief inspector of the United Nations

Special Commission, has said: "From a qualitative standpoint, Iraq has been disarmed. Iraq today possesses no meaningful weapons of mass destruction."

Most of the 'evidence' that is being touted by Bush and his supporter Tony Blair relies on the testimony of multi-millionaire Adnan Saeed al-Haideri and Dr. Khidir Hamza. Al-Haideri was an influential civil engineer who had close contacts with Saddam Hussein. He fled Iraq after a short time in prison and immediately made contact with the Iraqi National Congress, a group set up in the early 1990s with CIA help and now directly funded by the US State Department. British weapons inspector Terry Taylor, who has handled many Iraqi defectors and checked their evidence in Iraq, claims that many of them have a tendency to exaggerate their personal

knowledge and importance in order to guarantee pensions, protection and employment in their new countries, in particular the US.

For example Dr. Hamza, who was reportedly the mastermind of Iraq's nuclear ambitions, defected to the US in 1994. He too testified to the enormous nuclear reserves held by Hussein. He spoke on US television after Sept 11 speculating that Iraq had assisted Osama Bin Laden and the al-Qaeda. Such claims are now described as "baseless" and "picked out of Time Magazine" by Hamza's former mentor David Albright.

The only thing that is certain is that Iraq does not have the kind of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons that the US and its allies have. Israel, for example, has over 200 nuclear warheads aimed at Arab cities.

So what lies behind the US administration's determination to bomb Iraq? The reasons have far more to do with the US's role in the global economy than they do with the military potential of Iraq.



Donald Rumsfeld amidst the troops

Bush's cabinet reflects the degree to which Bush has a hot line to corporate America.

Vice-President Cheney is an oil executive, Condoleezza Rice is the director of a transnational oil corporation. Rumsfeld is a former chief executive officer of Searle pharmaceuticals who with his deputy Paul Wolfowitz argued passionately to overthrow Saddam Hussein in the late 1990s. In other words today's focus on Iraq amounts to unfinished business for these US hawks whose central business concern is control of the flow of oil in an unstable part of the world. At a time when economically the US is far from secure, and faces a potential threat to its dominance from China, control of resources like oil becomes more crucial. Economic competition in these circumstances can very quickly take on a military face.

There is huge division among the Bush administration, however, about how to launch war against Iraq. Some are calling for a full-scale invasion. Others believe the "Afghan model" can work in Iraq: that is devastating aerial bombardment coupled with support for a local military force similar to the Afghan Northern Alliance. But the traditional US attitude towards opposition against Hussein within Iraq shows clearly their real imperialist agenda.

Hawks in the Bush administration have insisted that the great mistake of the first Bush administration was not "finishing off" Saddam Hussein at the end of the Gulf War. But it had clear

reasons for not doing so. The US had no intention of supporting a democratic rebellion in Iraq, particularly one that might result in Shi'ite Muslims coming to power, as they had in the Iranian Revolution of 1979. New York Times and Guardian columnist Thomas Friedman reported in July 1991 that the Bush administration would have preferred a coup by Iraqi generals to overthrow Saddam Hussein, "and then Washington would have the best of all worlds: an iron-fisted Iraqi junta without Saddam Hussein."

The U.S. had no problem backing the rule of Saddam Hussein until 1990. As one former Reagan administration official put it, "Hussein is a bastard. But at the time he was our bastard." Things changed and now the US wants to replace Saddam Hussein with another strongman who will keep the brutal regime intact but who, crucially, they can also control.

US propaganda, of course, talks of the need to establish democracy in Iraq. So supportive is the US of this, that the State Department is funding a campaign to restore the Iraqi monarchy! The Iraqi "oppositionists" the US is courting are every bit as repressive as the regime they oppose.

"Hussein is a bastard. But at the time he was our bastard."

The Iraqi National Congress (INC) is the main Iraqi umbrella group sponsored by the US. The INC received millions of dollars from the CIA in 1993 to foster a

rebellion that failed. They then fell out of favour with the Clinton administration but rehabilitated themselves by funneling the defectors to the State Department who told the US exactly what they wanted to hear. As a result in 1998 the US Congress passed the "Iraq Liberation Act" pledging \$97 million, mainly to the INC. One of its key leaders is Ahmed Chalabi, a multi-millionaire banker who left Iraq in 1958 after the fall of the pro-Western British-installed monarchy. He made a fortune running the third largest bank in Jordan in the 1980s. He had to leave that country in the boot of a car in 1989, facing charges of embezzling tens of millions of dollars.

Chalabi is, however, from the 55 percent of the population of Iraq who are followers of the Shia version of Islam, which is also the religion of Iran. He has little support from the Sunni Muslim elites in central Iraq who have always dominated its government since Britain set the state up at the end of the First World War.

Another key figure who opposed Saddam Hussein is General Nizar Al Khazraji. He is one of about 50 Iraqi army officers who have defected to the West. All of them oversaw bloodshed and torture while in Iraq. Khazraji himself was chief of staff of the army between 1988 and 1990. That was the period in which the army gassed the Kurdish village of Halabja. Kurdish groups independent from the US have called for Khazraji to be prosecuted for war crimes.

While the US debates the future of Iraq the only thing that can be said with certainty is that more innocent people will die. More than 500,000 Iraqi children under the age of five have already died as a direct result of UN sanctions. Every month 5,000 children die from starvation and disease, almost twice the number who died in September 11.

In the name of enforcing UN resolutions on Iraq, the U.S. has committed the most flagrant violations of international law against the Iraqi people. Through both war and sanctions, they have violated the same laws that they now accuse Hussein of flouting. Should the U.S. military once again go to war against Iraq, expanding the "war against terrorism" will be nothing more than a convenient euphemism for extending US control around the world through force and fear.

However the US strategy is not without difficulties. Firstly, the US defence budget this year is \$379 billion after a recent rise of 14 per cent. This is the biggest increase in 20 years. Professor Paul Kennedy at Yale University calculates that the US now spends more each year than the next nine largest national defence budgets combined. Indeed America is responsible for about 40 per cent of the world's military spending.

But this defence spending will be paid for by a new deficit and cuts to every other federal spending programme - including social security, Medicare and urban renewal. The only major federal spending

programme not to be cut will be Bush's enormous tax breaks to the rich and middle classes. As the American economy shows little sign of reviving this could signal huge problems for Bush.

Secondly, while 79 percent of Americans are apparently supportive of an attack against Iraq (according to an opinion poll conducted by the New York Times, the paper also responsible for a litany of anti-Iraqi hysteria), 59 percent of them say their support is conditional on the US getting support from Europe and the Middle East. This could prove to be a difficult task for the Bush administration. Following the attacks on the World Trade Centre, the US and Britain were able to cobble together an international coalition of countries that supported their war on Afghanistan. As the war progressed, however, this was put under severe strain.

Thirdly, as mentioned, the US, while still the major economic power, is not without potential rivals – such as Europe, Japan or China. It is thus forced to operate in the reality of a multi-polar world. This means that US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Secretary of State Colin Powell, as well as Blair, have to travel the world to shore up support. And such support, without the ideological prop of outrage at the twin towers attack, is fragile. Splits have emerged between the

the US now spends more each year than the next nine largest national defence budgets combined. Indeed America is responsible for about 40 per cent of the world's military spending.

however, socialist arguments about the nature of the war and the importance of unequivocally opposing it will be crucial.

It is only imperialism that explains the connection between market capitalism and war as well as sharply helping to draw sides in the conflict. Anti-imperialists at the time of the Vietnam war knew which

side they were on. US imperialism was the enemy then just as it is today and it is that imperialist domination that needs to be challenged. Such clarity is important and provides us with useful antidotes to Bush and Blair's rhetoric. Opposing US domination does not mean supporting Saddam Hussein but it does mean that we recognise clearly the focus of the struggle to end the war. Also understanding the imperialist framework of US dominance shows the futility of believing that international institutions can bring US war-mongers to justice. Just like the WTO, the IMF or the World Bank, the international courts respond to the US's bidding; the weight of US interests within their ranks does not allow them to do otherwise.

Because war is so fundamental to the way the system operates, the links between anti-capitalism and anti-war movements must be made more strongly so that greater unity is built. The huge anti-capitalist protests that we have seen recently from Porto Alegre to Barcelona provide the potential to make opposition to Bush's war develop far more quickly than the anti-war movement in the 1960s. Even with the massive ideological weight of Sept 11, criticism of the US grew quickly and was exemplified in the international outrage over the treatment of the prisoners at Guantanamo Bay. Should the Bush administration decide to wage all out war on Iraq, what were doubts about the US's motives can turn to outright disgust and opposition.

In Ireland the antiwar movement must focus on the role that the Irish government plays in bolstering the war drive. Bush understands all too well the significance of having a nation with an underdog colonial past on board. Ahern's cringing acceptance of this role needs to be highlighted in the run up to the general election and anti-war candidates should be given the support of the Irish Anti War Movement. His alliance with Bush sits ill with his negotiating a neutrality protocol in the rejigged Nice Treaty.

All this means that the possibility of building a powerful anti-war movement is more favourable now than before. Public meetings against the war are drawing large numbers even before war on Iraq has been declared. Anti-war groups during the war in Afghanistan attracted enthusiastic and active support. Such work can be built on now to draw in many more to oppose the war on Iraq.

Bodies of Palestinian victims

allies. A number of European leaders, including the French Prime Minister and Britain's Chris Patten, have spoken out against extending the war. In Britain, the BBC conducted a poll of 100 Labour backbenchers. It found just eight in favour of attacking Iraq and 86 firmly against.

On top of this comes the increasing instability in the Middle East itself. Israel has continued its relentless assault on the Palestinians. If the US decides to attack Iraq, full-scale war becomes a distinct possibility in the region, where sympathy with the Palestinians is high.

Dick Cheney recently went on a support-gathering trip around the Middle East but got a cold shoulder from many Arab leaders. Saudi Arabia told the US in no uncertain terms that it would not support an attack against Iraq. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia has requested that the US close its military bases there. Without permission to operate on Saudi territory, any invasion of Iraq would be difficult.

Fourthly, the war against Afghanistan has already created enormous discontent. This was reflected in the demonstrations of thousands of people across the world, including in the US. There are clear signs that this opposition is now growing.

Bush's axis of evil is the ideological cover for another imperialist war like the First World War and the Vietnam War, and could become the rallying cry against the whole system. For this to happen,



SOCIALIST IDEAS

What is the role of the state?



G8 demonstrators in Genoa

Marnie Holborow looks at how the state works in today's world and whose interests it serves.

The consensus among governments is that the power of the state must be rolled back. We are told that the state blocks the workings of the market and that the less that's in the hands of the state the better.

This economic liberalism, like all ideologies, distorts the truth and is full of contradictions. Whatever they say, even the capitalists understand the state is a vital framework for market capitalism. The US administration's recent imposition of hefty tariffs on steel is a glaring example of state interference to defend and support national capitalism.

States work behind the scenes even for the seemingly independent multinational corporations. When the risk of bankruptcy threatens, a state will intervene to prevent a greater crisis. In the nineties in the US, Scandinavia and Japan, the state intervened to bale out hedge fund institutions and banks. More recently the Korean state, itself a prime mover in Korean capitalism, intervened to nationalise the giant company Daewoo.

Global capitalism also needs national states to coerce when necessary. Today's formidable military-industrial complex in the US demonstrates the massively strong arm of the capitalist state and the central role that the threat and use of force plays in enforcing economic dominance and protecting markets.

The economic and military role of the state was highlighted by Marx and Engels in the heyday of nineteenth century economic liberalism. When Marx and Engels were writing the dominant view, then as now, was that everything revolved around the invisible hand of the market and the state had a minimal role. But Marx pointed out that the capitalist state had a brutally coercive and vital purpose. Behind the so-called market forces that brought about the ruination of early Irish industry lay the occupation of Ireland by the British State. Behind the cotton markets dominated by British companies lay the brutal ravages of colonial rule in India. Behind the hidden hand of the market lay imperial states and their armies.

Marx and Engels pointed out that, despite appearances, the state was the concentrated power of those who ran capitalism. The state, far from being above society or neutral, was in fact an instrument of class rule. As the *Communist Manifesto* put it, the state is "but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie".

The crucial role of states is not just an academic question but is vital to understanding the type of social change needed to uproot capitalism. In periods of mass upheaval against the system, questions surrounding the state come to the fore. The socialist movement at the outbreak of World War One was split down the middle precisely on the issue of the state. Social democracy became openly reformist and declared its loyalty to national states whereas revolutionary socialists such as Connolly, Luxemburg and

the Bolsheviks argued that socialists had no fatherland and should oppose their own states. "The main enemy is at home" was their war slogan. Later, in the midst of revolution, Lenin's pamphlet *State and Revolution* showed how socialist revolution was needed to overthrow the state in order to create a new society run by workers.

In the 1960s confrontation with the brutal realities of the capitalist state – in the form of the war being waged by the US in Vietnam and the repression meted out against student and worker demonstrations in France – made thousands of people turn to revolutionary politics. However many believed that the movement was itself the alternative to capitalism and that the question of state power was not an issue.

Today we are seeing some similar arguments emerge. Few people would deny the corrupt, self-serving nature of capitalist states. But some would argue that globalisation and the power of transnational corporations has weakened the hold of national states. This leads

to the conclusion that the state need not be challenged and alternative forms of power can be created at local level. In the anti-war movement some hold the view that the militarism of states can be held in check by international courts or the UN. Both views, in different ways, fail to understand the way in which state power flows from the power of capital and how it is part and parcel of the capitalist system as a whole.

The very make-up of the state – with its executive bodies detached from popular

control and with its professional police force and army – allows it to be at the beck and call of big business and to serve the pursuit of profit. As a result, it can neither be ignored nor somehow disciplined into operating in the interests of peace or justice or on behalf of working people.

Instead, as Lenin pointed out, when the mass movement in the factories and on the streets is strong enough, the capitalist state has to be smashed and replaced with a different way of running society. This new workers' state is infinitely more democratic and has at its centre the mass representative bodies – workers' councils – of the revolutionary movement itself. But this new social order is only possible if the old state is overthrown. This is what happened in the 1917 October Revolution, even if the experience of a workers state itself was relatively short lived.

Today when the scale and concentration of capital is greater and more complex, understanding the power of the state is even more crucial than it was then. At an immediate level any mass movement will have to contend with the forces of the state, as the Genoa and Barcelona anti-capitalist demonstrations showed. But if it is to move beyond protest towards a revolutionary movement involving masses of workers, understanding the nature of the capitalist state at a broader level will be a vital link in the chain of real social change.

ANTI CAPITALISM – still

*Anti-capitalism hit the streets of Genoa last summer when over three hundred thousand demonstrators marched against the G8 and the policies of neo-liberalism. Attempts to divide the movement by accentuating tactical differences and playing peaceful protestors off against direct action demonstrators failed against a backdrop of clear state-led brutality. It was only in the aftermath of 9/11 that a palpable sigh of relief could be heard from Bush and friends that their war on terror would sound the final death knell for **anti-capitalism**. Events have not quite transpired as they would have hoped.*

With a huge anti capitalist conference taking place in Beirut before Christmas the true global reach of the movement became apparent. This was reinforced by the World Social Forum that took place in Porto Alegre after Christmas. The massive show of strength on the streets of Barcelona in March was the final indication that, rather than weakening the movement, the war on terror has highlighted the issues at the heart of the movement and brought an increased sense of urgency to the need for change.

PORTO ALEGRE: From protests to proposals

Mike Gonzalez

The World Social Forum had met for the first time last year; called by a wide range of social movements and NGOs, it was a kind of 'alternative summit' to the international gatherings of bankers, financiers and corporate executives that regularly happened at one luxury resort or another.

45,000 people marched through the streets of Porto Alegre in the evening of January 31st to launch the forum. Their banners were testimony to the rich and varied experience of the movement; the red flags of the MST (the Brazilian Landless People's Movement), the placards of organisations of the unemployed and squatters from Brazil and Argentina; there were trade union banners from across the Americas, and others that signalled the presence of indigenous organisations from Ecuador and Colombia. There were signs denouncing the war in Afghanistan, GM foods and ecological destruction. From Europe and elsewhere, the flags of ATTAC called for the taxation of international capital movements through the Tobin Tax; and yellow flags and baseball caps announced the arrival of 1500 delegates from Italy's Genoa Social Forum.

When the conference began the next day, discussion focussed on issues thrown up by the experience of struggle against neo-liberalism. Who should control the land, how to create independent mass media, how to defend education as a right. The Forum was not simply a celebration of the movement and its struggles, its purpose was to consider the future. As one journalist commented to me, "es hora de pasar de las protestas a las propuestas" - it's time to move from protest to proposals. If, as the Forum's motto announced, "A better world is possible", what kind of world would it be, and how could we achieve it.

For some, at least, that 'better world' would be a more humane version of the same - there was talk of expansion of the G-8 group of industrial nations to become the G-16; the Tobin Tax figured large, since some people suggested that taxing multinational profits (to the tune of 8% or so) would produce a fund that would enable the World Bank and others to resolve some of the more destructive effects of neo-liberal policies. There were even suggestions of direct discussions between the World Trade Organisation, the IMF, Davos and the Social Forum to negotiate a more humane global economic strategy (suggestions echoed by recent statements from the Davos Group itself acknowledging that the multinationals had failed to fulfil their social obligations).

There was a strong sense, though, that these discussions were all happening at some distance from the living movement assembled in Porto Alegre. Elsewhere, these were not the questions that concerned people. At the Youth Camp, for instance, some 15,000 young people discussed and argued throughout the four days of the Forum. Their eyes were fixed on Argentina and Genoa.

Throughout the four days of debate, Argentine flags waved around the conference centre. Argentina was in deep crisis; this major industrial economy had obeyed the IMF's instructions ten years earlier. Now the economy was collapsing. One President resigned to be followed quickly by two others with no alternative to offer. Argentina exposed the realities of global neo-liberal economics in the harshest light.

But Argentina was in everyone's mind for a different reason too. The response to the crisis, after the initial demonstrations, had been the creation of Popular Assemblies in urban areas and districts. Once, twice, several times a week people would gather to discuss what had to be done - trade unionists, students, neighbourhood

organisations, the unemployed met to discuss their demands and to organise a continuous movement of protest and resistance. They denounced the corruption of politicians, the protection of foreign investors, the collapse of the public sector. (And they are still meeting)

In some senses, these were the alternatives before the Porto Alegre Forum. Could the system be reformed, or humanised, through negotiation? And what would be the instrument to make this happen? A strengthened national state? Or some new international association? Latin America has long and bitter experience of the attempt to create states that would be politically and economically independent: Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Cuba, Nicaragua - all from very different

growing, still strong

starting points, tried to erect national defences against a global capitalist system. And each of them was besieged and ultimately surrendered to the international financial institutions.

Yet Latin America had produced a very different set of examples too - of successful resistance to the imposition of economic laws. In Ecuador in 1999 a mass movement of trade unionists and indigenous peoples brought down a government that had tried to enforce the integration of the national economy into the world system (through 'dollarisation'); in Bolivia in 2001, privatisations were reversed after mass resistance; in Genoa, it was mass activity that faced down the

Italian state; and in Argentina, the Popular Assemblies were signs of a very different kind of power.

The anti-capitalist movement has its roots in local struggles, but its vision is global. That is its strength and that is what makes it new. The better world the Forum spoke of can only grow out of that global vision. At one meeting a young Brazilian woman asked me "Why are we against globalisation? I would like to see a globalised world". She was right. It is capitalist globalisation we are opposed to. In the future, as the MST banner unfurled at the final meeting put it, "A better world will be possible, but only under socialism".

BARCELONA: Un otro mundo es posible

From the Irish coverage, you could be forgiven for knowing little of the 500,000 strong protest against the EU summit in Barcelona in March. Guy Miles travelled from Wales to Barcelona. His account gives a feel for the way the movement is spreading from below to involve more and more people and the electric effect it had on its participants.

I travelled to Barcelona by coach from London. London gave me a feel of the political mood to come. As I left Forest Gate in East London a 20ft wide graffiti mural bore the word 'Genocide' alongside a disturbed, anguished man clutching at his head. In smaller letters above it read 'starring G.W. Bush'. Underneath was written 'coming to a 3rd world country near you soon'.

I arrived in Barcelona and went to the university where a lecture on imperialism had not long finished. The trade union demo against the EU leaders the day before had been huge (between 100,000 and 120,000). It focused on the neo-liberal corporate agenda of privatisation and attacks on workers' rights and had contingents from Spain, France, Italy and elsewhere. It was also strongly anti-war.

The following day was the day for direct action. I was there for peaceful protest and spent a couple of hours carefully, narrowly avoiding 'definitely going to get nicked situations' whilst observing a couple of hundred black bloc anarchists confronting the police. The situation deteriorated rapidly and we decided to head off to Gaudi park above Barcelona where we chilled out above the sirens and helicopters. Later we returned to a place where Che Guevaran murals were being displayed and came across a party in a square with drummers and thousands of dancing anti-capitalists.

On the day of the Saturday demonstration, we assembled in one of the pre-arranged meeting points. There were three main blocks. The first, and biggest, was organised by the NGOs, anti-globalisation groups, ATTAC and others. The second was made up of national groups from around Europe. The third was organised by the Barcelona Social Forum (trade unionists, left wing parties etc.) and was nearly as big as the first.

The UK anti-capitalist and GR flags flew and we were rapidly absorbed into a carnival atmosphere. Everyone smiled and the crowds cheered, shouted and chanted together for another world. Drums, bands and instruments set the tone and the numbers of people drove it to a feverish pitch. For four hours the demonstration continued to the applause and waves of the residents of Barcelona. I left GR and fell into the tail end of the march where the outrageous indiscriminate polizia lashed into some of the protesters. For me the beauty of the march was the four hours of peaceful protest, and that the message of half a million people expressing the views of countless millions more was seen worldwide.

A short speech by the mayor of Barcelona condemning capitalism was white hotly received and opened the free concert, including Manu Chao - musical trade mark of anti-capitalism at this stage - which started later in a nearby football stadium. Hundreds of thousands danced until the early morning.

Meanwhile in the conference centre, leaders of the EU pushed the unpopular neo-liberal policies of their corporate masters, continuing the onslaught on the world's disadvantaged and ignoring the cries of the 3rd world. Tony Blair stood unashamedly united with Silvio Berlusconi and Jose Aznar both of whose far right parties are made up of open supporters of previous fascist dictators Mussolini and General Franco. Blair was however left alone hanging on to the coat tails of George Bush's war policy, which even the other leaders have so far rejected!

The demonstration in Barcelona was against war and profit and for people and the active construction of a better world. Barcelona refuted our "leaders'" professed fantasy that the anti-capitalist movement was split apart by the tragedy of Sept 11th. It was the biggest anti-capitalist demonstration ever. It now seems to be the only sensible alternative to the radical approaches of Osama Bin Laden's Islamic fundamentalism, George Bush's crusade of Christian corporate fundamentalism and Ariel Sharon's Zionist fundamentalism.

Guy Miles



Demonstration against the EU summit in Barcelona



The Privatisation of Ireland



O'Rourke

The state sector, a source of pride for many of its users and long defended by the trade union movement, is in the process of being sold off. The refuse charges, a contentious issue in the forthcoming general election, is the first step towards full scale privatisation of the service. But refuse is just the tip of the iceberg, as Deirdre Cronin argues.

The neo-liberal agenda of privatisation and corporate takeover, so despised by millions of people across the globe, is being aggressively implemented in Ireland. The present rightwing government has managed, under the guise of social partnership, to undermine our semi-state sector and to begin the process of opening up all our public services to private sector profiteers. Since 1987, government, business and trade union leaders have worked together to create a climate where business can thrive. The view that competition, flexibility and deregulation are good has become the unquestioned orthodoxy. It has led to the sell-off of State-run telecommunications and the Irish National Petroleum Corporation, while the Electricity Supply Board, the national airline and many others are being slimmed down for privatisation or part-privatisation and massive tax incentives are being offered to developers to build more private hospitals. It has resulted most recently in the involvement of the private sector in designing, building, financing and operating roads, schools and water treatment plants. Behind all this is the desire to limit spending on services for people's basic needs (for which we pay our taxes) and to allow big business into areas that will provide extraordinary opportunities for profit making.

The anti-capitalist movement has shown how this agenda has been set by multinational corporations and their political lackeys at a global level. The World Trade Organisation is at present negotiating a General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) which will have enormous implications for public services throughout the world. John Pilger, the campaigning journalist, has explained these most succinctly: *"The scope of GATS is breathtaking. Almost every human activity is designated a service from transport and tourism to water, health and education. Foreign companies will be allowed to take over almost any public service on the basis of a secret 'agreement' that is irreversible".*

At EU level the same agenda is at play. Over the last decade numerous directives aimed at achieving deregulation in a range of sectors have been introduced. A 1996 directive for example required that 28% of the electricity market open up to competition from February 1 2000. By 2003, 32% will be opened. In an EU that is largely an instrument of big business

the European Round Table of Industrialists, composed of the chief executives of the most powerful EU based multinationals, exerts huge control over the direction of policy. An example of their agenda is apparent in a report they produced on job creation in 1998. In it they warned *"education is entrusted to people who appear to have no dialogue with, or understanding of, industry and the path of progress. The provision of education is a market opportunity and should be treated as such"*. Any idea that European capitalism is somehow more socially sensitive than the US variety disappears in this embracing of untrammelled market forces within the EU. Given that many European governments are also social democratic, it says little of any alternative offered by Blair's or Schroeder's so called "Third Way".

The Irish government, too, has not raised any objections to the promotion of this agenda and has enthusiastically launched its own drive to sell off semi-state companies and public services. The energy sector is a major focus for privatisation internationally at present and already the government has sold the Irish National Petroleum Corporation, which was responsible for Ireland's oil refinery in Bantry Bay, to the Tosco Corporation. Tosco, one of the largest corporations in the US, has an appalling environmental record.

In the ESB in 2001 the option of privatisation was rejected for the time being. The opposition of the ESB Group of Unions was crucial but interestingly their opposition was not to privatisation per se but its timing. They seemed blissfully unaware of the disastrous consequences of privatisation in California which has suffered both higher domestic electricity costs and power cuts because of lack of planning and co-ordination by private companies concerned only with the immediate short-term maximisation of profit. The ESB has already shed thousands of jobs (voluntarily) in the rationalisation and restructuring process that inevitably precedes sell off and it is highly unlikely that private companies will retain the numbers that currently work in the sector. The loss of this type of job has been huge in the last decade. In the years between 1990 and 1994 there was a 5% decline in employment levels in the Irish semi-state sector. The rate of decline has accelerated since then.



The true reality of privatisation has already been illustrated clearly for us with the experience of Eircom. Minister Mary O'Rourke, when selling privatisation to a conference of the Communication Workers Union, told members that the company would "literally be owned by the people" and they would "have a say in its development over the coming years". Two years later, the 450,000 shareholders who didn't sell in the immediate aftermath of flotation have suffered a 30% loss, Eircom has been broken up and the profitable assets sold off to Vodafone, a global multinational.

Aware of the need for caution following the Eircom debacle, the government has made sure to involve the trade union leadership at an even more fundamental level in the drive to privatise. The concept of Public Private Partnership (PPP) was mentioned in the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF) but its implications are only becoming clear now. The trade union leadership that so keenly promoted the PPF failed to warn or even allow debate on the idea that parts of our public sector should be opened to private sector finance and control. As far as neo-liberalism is concerned, the Irish trade union movement has been extraordinarily compliant.

Opposition to privatisation in Britain, on the other hand, is growing because the results of it are plain to see. The Guardian columnist George Monbiot has completed a comprehensive study of the Private Finance Initiative (PFI), which can be found in his book *"The Captive State"*. He discovered that projects are invented that will make money for private companies rather than best meet the needs of the people who use the service. In Coventry, instead of refurbishing the two existing hospitals at a cost of £30 million, a privately financed demolition of both hospitals and the rebuilding of a smaller hospital outside town with fewer beds and fewer staff at a cost of £36 million per annum, for decades, was embarked upon. The Health Authority and the local population opposed the plan but it was made clear to them, as it has been to many communities throughout Britain, that if you don't apply for a PFI scheme you can make do with your existing facilities.

Once PFI is agreed there is a compulsion to make it attractive to a private consortium to invest in. A contract for renovation thus becomes too small and too cheap to be enticing, so more expensive,

less suitable facilities are agreed purely to make money for private companies. The British experience shows how quickly the costs of these projects spiral out of control. The British Medical Association (BMA) has found that between first proposal and final deal with private consortia, the cost of schemes has risen by an average of 72%. In the area of transport the campaigning group Transport 2000 found that when hidden costs were

taken into account private roads are two and a half times more expensive than public ones.

With regard to the implications of PFI for service provision the BMA's research is frightening. They estimate that on average 26% of beds belonging to the English health trusts using PFI will disappear, while Scotland will lose 30%.

Against this background, the rapidity with which PPP projects are being devised and implemented in this country is a cause for huge concern. The State Authorities (PPP Arrangements) Bill 2001 has now passed all stages in the Dail and Seanad and will shortly pass into law. This will give the green light for the approval of hundreds more PPP projects. Unfortunately there has been little debate on the issue but even at this stage it is clear that many of these projects are heading along the British route.

Road building has seen the greatest proliferation of PPPs to date. Eleven major motorway projects will be financed through PPPs with tolls levied by the private companies involved in order to recoup part of their costs. The National Roads Authority (NRA) has tentatively set the tolls at between €1.40 and €2.10 per car. Two tolls are proposed on roads from Dublin to Galway, Limerick and Cork.

Already serious question marks can be raised about these projects. It is unclear how the decision to build a motorway network was arrived at. According to the NRA's own Road Needs study in 1998, motorways were not needed on all routes. The Campaign for Sensible Transport discovered that there was no traffic engineering analysis to back up the "need" for motorways. In one case, the N8 Action Group pointed out that by following an alternative route along the existing railway line tolled roads would not be required, thousands of acres of farmland would be saved and, crucially, costs would be £1 billion less than the NRAs proposed route. Its proposal was turned down. Tolls are not something that the private consortia want overruled as there is huge

Eleven major motorway projects will be financed through PPPs with tolls levied by the private companies involved in order to recoup part of their costs.

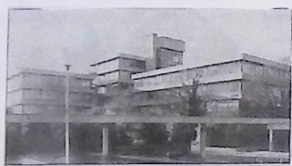
Over a 30 year period, for example, over €1 billion will be collected on the Fermoy bypass in county Cork for an input of just €80 million.



money in it for them. Over a 30 year period, for example, over €1 billion will be collected on the Fermoy bypass in county Cork for an input of just €80 million.

Public transport is also the subject of the drive towards PPP. Mary O'Rourke has been very clear about her plans for the railways. A policy document from her Department in 2000 talked of "transferring ownership of the (rail) operating company to the private sector". A Rail Procurement Agency was established on December 28, its purpose being to develop rail based public transport through PPPs. The contract to run Luas which has recently been awarded to Connex is a sign of things to come. Connex, a French multinational company, recently lost an unfair dismissal case after they tried to sack a train driver who had complained about safety. The chair of the tribunal found that Connex "were more concerned about costs than safety". They were the first company in Britain to lose their license since privatisation for operating "late and overcrowded trains". Connex workers in Melbourne went on strike a few months ago when the company tried to impose pay cuts and freezes.

Already the costs of the Luas project have escalated from an original €508 million to €677 million. The proposed Metro will also be constructed under PPPs. The cheaper option of using existing rail lines has been rejected in favour of a more expensive and financially lucrative deal for whatever consortium eventually gets the contract.



UCD – Factory style education

It is perhaps in education though that the ethical and political questions around privatisation stand out most starkly. Five secondary schools and the Cork College of Music are in their construction phase under PPPs. The contract for schools was awarded to a company called Jarvis plc. Jarvis have specialised in PFI projects in Britain and find them very profitable. An initial estimate of stg£12 million for building a school in Dorset rose to stg£15.2 million and ultimately ended up being worth stg£22 million to Jarvis. It is also involved in health and transport projects. It is responsible for 65% of plain line track renewals in Britain and the maintenance of 6500 kms of rail infrastructure but in August 2000 was fined stg£500,000 for breaches of health and safety regulations following two freight train derailments in the previous year. The prospect of handing over the operation of some of our secondary schools to this kind of company should fill us with dread.

At third level, as the recent Skilbeck report shows, accountability and academic freedom will count for nothing if the corporate agenda succeeds in taking over the campuses. Academics will increasingly be expected to become more "entrepreneurial", fee-paying students from abroad will make up the financial shortfall from the government and industry will sponsor more research.

PPPs are in the process of being introduced into the health sector. All recent reports, including the Health Strategy document, have extolled the virtues of private sector involvement in improving health infrastructure. There is currently a proposal on the table to hand over geriatric care to private companies.

Resistance to PPP has occurred in one area – water treatment. Last year a €63.5 million upgrade of the Ballymore Eustace Plant was proposed under PPPs. Workers at the plant were involved in industrial action and even an ICTU critique of the proposals was forced to admit that:

- It would take six months longer to build the plant under the PPP arrangement
- It would be more costly to operate
- It would offer less protection to consumers than one owned by the Corporation

At present trade unions are involved in forums across the public sector where PPPs are being discussed and foisted upon workers in much the same way as they are in Britain. It is time to mount a defence of these services. The issues of underfunding and the drive towards private sector finance are inherently linked. We need to challenge the neoliberal consensus that claims we cannot expect the government to fund services any more. People who work in these services as well as all of us who use them need to join together to oppose profiteers wreaking havoc on our daily lives. In Bolivia water privatisation was stopped in its tracks by a massive campaign on the ground. In Britain we are seeing the stirrings of a fight-back against the ravages of privatisation of the trains. The anti-capitalist movement world-wide has injected political confidence into local opposition to privatisation and we need to bring that lesson here.

PPPs – Recipe for Disaster

Public Private Partnerships (PPP) form an integral part of the much heralded National Development Plan 2000-2006, which involves the investment of more than €52 billion of public, private and EU funds in health services, social housing, education, roads, public transport, rural development, water and waste services. PPPs themselves are defined as "a partnership between the public and private sector for the purpose of delivering a project or service traditionally provided by the public sector" (Government PPP unit). There are different varieties of PPP the most common being DBFO (design, build, finance, operate): under this type of scheme a private company designs, builds, finances and operates a facility which the state then buys back on hire purchase (to all intents and purposes) over a period of twenty five years, when it will then most likely revert to public ownership.

All the evidence available from Britain, where PPPs are more commonly known as Private Finance Initiatives (PFI), shows they are disastrous. According to a document produced by UNISON, one of the public sector unions:

- **PFI is a more costly way of financing public services than direct borrowing by the public sector as no company can borrow at cheaper rates of interest than government. The buy now, pay later approach hides the real costs and passes them on to the next generation. In addition the set up costs of PFI contracts are higher. The first NHS trusts set up under PFI spent £45 million on advisers. Government is using PFI to avoid properly funding public investment in services and infrastructure.**
- **PFI projects tend to escalate both in scale and cost -leading to financial shortfalls that must be met from other parts of the public sector or by redundancies in service provision.**
- **Staff transferred to private companies and new staff tend to suffer a worsening in terms and conditions as well as cuts in jobs.**
- **Increasingly there will be a loss of democratic control over assets and service provision.**

(Challenging the PFI, UNISON)

IRELAND UNCOVERED

What is Liam Lawlor up to?



Liam Lawlor, tight lipped?

What is Liam Lawlor up to? Why has the West Dublin TD chosen to spend six weeks behind bars, and fork out half a million on legal fees and fines rather than tell the Flood Tribunal where he got his money? Is he protecting someone? Is he hiding something? Or is he just plain stupid? Rod Fitzsimons puts his nose in the trough.

Lawlor says it is all a big mistake. He didn't fully understand what the Flood Tribunal wanted from him. He knows now, he says, and he's doing his best to help, but it's not easy. Poor Liam. Poor Liam my arse.

The Supreme Court has established that he lied in the witness box at the Flood Tribunal. He "deliberately deceived" in sworn affidavits to the High Court. He deceived the Dail and Fianna Fail's Standards in Public Life Committee.

So can we believe him when he says he wasn't on the take when he was a Dublin County Councillor – as alleged by former government press secretary, Frank Dunlop and big-time property developer Tom Gilmarin?

Dunlop says he gave Lawlor ('Mr Big') £40,000 in cash in a plastic bag to get land rezoned for the building of Liffey Valley shopping centre. Dunlop admitted spreading another £100,000 among a dozen or so other Councillors for the same purpose.

Tom Gilmarin, who thought up the idea of Liffey Valley, says he gave £50,000 to the then Environment Minister, Pdraig Flynn (who hasn't denied it), and a whopping £85,000 to Lawlor (who has denied it). Gilmarin also says he was asked to put £5 million into an Isle of Man bank account following a meeting with Charles Haughey, arranged by Liam Lawlor. Bertie Ahern was also at this meeting. He said subsequently he'd never met Gilmarin, then admitted to meeting him on three separate occasions. Teflon Bertie?

The Dunlop/Gilmarin payments to Lawlor account for only a fraction of what passed through his hands, while a full time public representative. Over the last twenty years £4.7m was lodged in 18 bank accounts controlled by Lawlor. (Initially he told the Flood Tribunal he only had 8 bank accounts. They now say they have uncovered 110 accounts.)

If Lawlor was indeed 'on the take', he was taking, on average every year, around ten times his Dail salary.

The Flood Tribunal has now traced £1.5m of Lawlor's money back to named builders, developers and others. They also know he issued bogus receipts for much of this money. But Lawlor claims the payments were simply 'political donations.' It was pure coincidence that his beneficiaries also happened to benefit from political decisions that Lawlor was in a position to influence.

The Tribunal also found that huge sums of money had gone to Lawlor from a bank account in Liechtenstein. Under oath he denied the Liechtenstein account was his. Further investigations by Tribunal

Under oath he denied the Liechtenstein account was his. Further investigations by Tribunal lawyers revealed that not only did Lawlor own this account, he owned seven others in Liechtenstein as well!

lawyers revealed that not only did Lawlor own this account, he owned seven others in Liechtenstein as well! Lying under oath is a serious criminal offence. Why take the risk if you don't have something big to hide?

Certainly the amount of money in Lawlor's Liechtenstein accounts was huge – much bigger than the bribes he is alleged to have taken as a County Councillor. In a short number of years over £700,000 went through these accounts. Lawlor's explanation – that he borrowed the money from a man in Jersey to settle bank debts – isn't believed by the Tribunal. They suspect much of the money came from a man called John Caldwell who worked for Dublin solicitors, Binchey. Binchey's offices were raided recently by officers from the Criminal Assets Bureau, acting for the Flood Tribunal.

Lawlor also has to explain nearly £1 million that went into the bank account of a company called Advanced Proteins, which never traded. Lawlor says much of the money came from beef baron Larry Goodman for protein research that came to nothing. By an amazing coincidence, Goodman paid over £300,000 into the account at the very time Charles Haughey's government was giving Goodman massive subsidies worth millions upon millions of pounds.

Lawlor deliberately covered up his dealings with Goodman, attracting another jail sentence for contempt, suggesting he has something significant to hide.

Lawlor's first spell in Mountjoy followed his refusal to answer questions about his dealings in the Czech Republic. He developed connections there in the early 1990s when public assets were being diverted wholesale into private hands, under a deeply corrupt regime. So what is it about his Czech business that was worth going to jail to keep secret?

For forty years Fianna Fail not only tolerated Liam Lawlor but honoured him. He was a close pal of Haughey in the 1970s, and close to Ahern in the 80s. He was party organiser for five years. Bertie Ahern made him spokesman on the arts and appointed him to three key Dail committees (including, laughably, the one responsible for monitoring TDs' ethics). And in the end, when things got too hot for Lawlor, it wasn't Fianna Fail who kicked him out, but Lawlor who resigned from the party.

Lawlor has hinted (loudly) that he knows where the bodies are buried, and that there are some very senior people in and around Fianna Fail whose fate is in his hands. He could be bluffing, as with so much in his life, but there's no doubt his next appearance in the witness box at the Flood Tribunal is keenly awaited.

'there are some very senior people in and around Fianna Fail whose fate is in his hands'

THE ELECTIONS

A real alternative – or more of the same

The ballot box is not always the first place people look to for change. In Argentina when the banks refused to pay out money in the economic melt-down that country was experiencing, thousands protested, demonstrated and went on strike to force the government to take action to improve their circumstances. In Italy two million people came took to the streets on 23rd March to stop Berlusconi's liberalisation of the labour market and to protest against the Red Brigades' killing of a Government minister. Similar mobilisations contributed to Berlusconi's fall in 1994. Even in Ireland, despite all the soundbytes from politicians about the run down health service, it took the nurses' strike to get the government to begin to address the problems besetting A&E departments in our hospitals. In comparison to the power of people on the streets, the casting of a vote in an election is very limited in the extent to which it actually affects change.

In Ireland voters have good reason to be cynical considering the disdain that our government has recently demonstrated towards the democratic process. Following the rejection of the Nice Treaty government ministers spoke of a "confused message" and told voters that they would be offered the chance to pass it in another referendum. After the rejection of the abortion referendum Fianna Fail felt under no obligation to take the decision on board. Ahern had said that a rejection of the referendum would lead to a liberal abortion regime but he has now proclaimed that he is in no hurry to bring forward legislation. Ahern may shake Bush's hand and agree that the democratic deficit has to be tackled in rogue states, but at home his respect for ballot outcomes is pretty thin.

FF may be pleased with the polls but there is a recognition that job losses, the demise of the Celtic Tiger and a deterioration in living standards will boost a vote against them. That is why some of their TDs dredge up the racist card. Their Cork North Central TD Noel O Flynn's description of refugees as "freeloaders and spongers" is a blatant attempt to deflect from the Government's inability to deal with poverty and poor services in one of the poorest constituencies in a city that hardly saw the Celtic Tiger. In such a climate, it is unsurprising that groups like the racist Immigration Control Platform have felt confident enough to stand candidates in the election.

The one thing in the current government's favour is the weaknesses of the opposition in Dail Eireann. It is hardly surprising that Fine Gael's campaign is almost indistinguishable from FF's but the degree to which the Labour Party trails the right is remarkable. Its main objective is to enter the corridors of power. Dick Spring has already arrogantly reserved his place as Minister for Enterprise and Employment and although Quinn talks clever about putting conditions on entering government, most believe that a few promises to spend more on health will be enough to entice him. We should remember that the last time Quinn was Finance Minister even

the *Irish Independent* described his first budget as "*Ruairi's Bourgeois Budget*". Nor should we forget that in 1992 when the Labour party received their highest vote in the history of the state, they promptly entered a FF led coalition government and went on to support a tax amnesty for the rich. In this, the Irish Labour Party is no different to the mainstream Social Democracy in Europe which has abandoned its commitment to the state provision of services and has become indistinguishable from the right. The Irish Labour Party does not even refer to a Third Way. The few left wingers like Michael D Higgins or Joe Costello provide an occasional radical face. Far from changing the Labour party they are mostly smothered by it. Michael D has spoken out against Bush's war drive in opposition but does anyone really believe it would become a resigning issue once in government?



Noonan and Ahern

The real reason for a low poll turnout

The main beneficiary of the desire for change from this state of affairs will undoubtedly be Sinn Fein. Unquestionably their opposition to the Nice referendum and to the introduction of refuse charges in Dublin does set them apart from the other parties in Dail Eireann.

But Sinn Fein, as is argued elsewhere in this issue, is a hybrid party with a cross class nationalist perspective and all the contradictions that implies. They too have hedged their bets on the issue of coalition and, while they may not enter coalition this time, they will almost certainly be a coalition partner sometime in the future.

Coalition is also the test for Independents and the Green Party. While there has been some debate among the Greens as to whether they will enter coalition government, Trevor Sargent leaves us in little doubt that he would like to see the Greens in government. In Germany such disagreements led to a clear split between those like Joscha Fischer who wanted to enter the institutions and a more radical campaign-orientated wing who were effectively squeezed out of the official party. The Irish Greens are heading towards the same tensions as they are drawn into the debate around coalition.



Elections, as Lenin once remarked, are barometers which give an overall indication of how people are thinking at a particular point in time. Because they focus on policies, on the issues of the day and the way in which society should be going (even if such talk often remains no more than empty rhetoric) no one who wants to see change in society should stand aside from them. Even though the major decisions are taken in the boardrooms of industry, and global capital effects more changes in people's lives than empty-seated parliaments, voting is nevertheless a testing of the political waters that should not be let pass. Voting for socialist candidates can become an expression of opposition to the right wing consensus of the establishment parties and can give a voice to the many workers who want to see change.

A growing vote for socialist candidates can also give more confidence to people to fight back – whether that means opposing paying charges for refuse or opposing the rundown state of our hospitals.

Colm O'Riain

A voice for change

The Socialist Workers Party is standing seven candidates in the general election. We spoke to one of them, Catherine Kennedy, who is contesting a seat in the Wicklow constituency

Can you tell us a bit about your background?

I was brought up in Palermo, a working class estate in Bray, in a family of six girls and two boys. My mother was a local independent counsellor who was well known for standing up for the rights of ordinary people in Bray. I played soccer and camogie for the county. Today I live in the Old Court estate with my daughters and granddaughter.

When did you first come across socialist politics?

In 1968 when I was 13 I took part in an anti apartheid demo outside the Royal Hotel in Bray against the visit of the Springboks. I felt it was so unjust that black Africans couldn't play for their national team. In the 60s and 70s I campaigned for socialist candidate Seamus Costello in local and general elections. Seamus organised mass trespass campaigns in Brittas Bay and other areas to force access to beaches and other lands for the public. I also took part in the great demonstration on the British embassy in Dublin after Bloody Sunday in 1972.

What about more recent involvement?

In January 2000 I became involved in supporting the strike of the binnenn against privatisation. I had been to London the previous November and had seen the state of bin collection over there, and couldn't believe that the Council were attempting to bring Thatcherism to Bray. I helped to organise support for the strike and became a spokesperson for it in the local press. The SWP were central to the strike, and I joined them. Their politics gave me a belief that there was a way to organise working people to fight the powers that be, and to win. The SWP supports the struggle of ordinary people and was born out of the suffering and struggles of the working class. They encourage people to assert their rights. All the other parties try to take them away.

You went as part of the Irish delegation to the anti-capitalist protest against the World Bank in Prague 2000. Can you tell us why?

Because I wanted to tell the bastards who were setting the agenda of neo-liberalism and privatisation for the whole planet that they weren't going to get away with it. Previous generations have paid a high price, some with their lives, to get us this far, and no one is going to take away the rights and services they have won for us. Especially faceless people who don't care about us.

How would you describe the experience of taking part in the World Bank protest?

Awesome. It was awesome to be part of a mass surge of protest along side people like myself from all over Europe. The violence of the state and the lies that were told about us in the media brought home to me the reality of what's at stake, and the need for ordinary people to be organised.

Like a lot of socialist women around the country you campaigned strongly for a no vote from a pro-choice position in the recent abortion referendum. What have you got to say about this issue and about women's rights in general?

People have told the government how it's time to stop acting in a most hypocritical way with the issue of unwanted pregnancies. It's a woman's right to choose, and they should legislate for that right.

I have spent the last twenty years of my life raising my family as a single mother, separated woman, whatever label you want to put on me. And that is always what women are – labeled, patronised and dismissed, particularly working class women always on the fringes of society. Equality is at the heart of socialism and working class men and women, whether educated or not, have to fight for women's rights.

You have also spoken out strongly against the so-called war against terrorism. Why?

Because nobody is bombing any country in my name. Bush has no right to bring death and destruction on any country, its people who have no say in the matter, young men and women, the old, children, the whole community who suffer.

Right wing politicians have already started using refugees as a scapegoat for social problems in order to win the votes of working class people. What would you say to workers about this?

Don't listen to them. It's a red herring, a smoke screen for their squandering of the country's wealth, for their serious cash back clauses for the multi-nationals and their rich friends. I look forward to a multicultural Ireland.

Beside the above, what issues are you standing on in the general elections?

Anti privatisation of the bin service, the sea front and other local services and amenities. For an emergency house-building programme, for a full-time fire service in Bray and Wicklow, for proper crèche facilities for young mothers and for sustainable jobs. In this election we're sowing the seeds of socialism in the county of Wicklow. I am standing in order to convince as many people as possible to actively fight for socialism



Catherine Kennedy

Sinn Fein: a radical vote for a radical party?

Sinn Fein will attract an anti-establishment working-class vote. But, Kieran Allen asks, how radical are they?

Whenever you want a glimpse of the fears and obsessions of the Irish rich, it is always a good idea to check out the *Sunday Independent*. It is barely a newspaper – more a series of commentaries from the ideologues of the right. Recently, the rise of Sinn Fein has figured high on their obsessions. In one recent issue they devoted three major articles to demonising Martin Ferris as a hate figure who posed a deadly threat to the institutions of the Southern State.

Socialists have little time for Ferris's particular drug reduction programmes. The mere fact that Sinn Fein owns and profits from a host of public houses shows the hypocrisy of their attack on cannabis dealers and users. But *The Sunday Independent* is not attacking Sinn Fein in the name of an enlightened drug policy. Its aim is to frighten voters off a party that is rising rapidly in the opinion polls.

Ever since 1994, the ruling class has concentrated on bringing the republicans in from the cold, into "legitimate politics". Now they have realised that the party could become a focus of a growing discontent that might help to destabilise the South, upsetting its role as an Atlantic tax haven for US multinationals. Sinn Fein's own leaders, of course, are more than happy to do business with US multinationals. But the party is growing by adopting a left rhetoric and that is worrying for a ruling class that could once claim that 85% of their electorate voted for right wing parties.

Sinn Fein's left rhetoric is not consistent and is diluted by all sorts of other elements, not least the whiff of a do-it-yourself law and order policy. But the predominant reason why many workers look to Sinn Fein is that they are seen to attack the political establishment, to oppose its corruption and to offer a wider share of the economy to workers. With the paralysis of the Labour Party, reformist aspirations will seek other homes and Sinn Fein is one such home.

In the late 1920s, Fianna Fail established an urban working class base by using a similar rhetoric. It wanted to uproot the banking system and replace it with credit unions. It backed strikes – though mainly against British owned companies. Sean Lemass called for the abolition of a standing army as a relic of colonialism while DeValera proclaimed himself an ardent follower of James Connolly. There is little reason to believe that Sinn Fein's rhetorical opposition to the system is more consistent and thoroughgoing than Fianna Fail's. In fact a careful reading of the arguments of Gerry Adams shows exactly why Sinn Fein needs to be challenged from the left.



Martin Ferris



Gerry Adams

A threat to
democracy or
ready to join the
establishment?

Modern day republicanism claims a single line of continuity back to the United Irishmen. Yet the particular birth and historic experience of the Provos is rooted in Catholic working class ghettos in the North in the early seventies. Adams started out in republican left circles in Belfast, attending anti-Vietnam war demos and organising housing action campaigns. He soon found himself in conflict with the official leadership of the republican movement who, under the influence of the Communist Party, had adopted a strategy of seeking to reform the six county state through the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association. He argued, quite correctly, that this approach 'underestimated the reactionary nature of the state' and its willingness to put down even modest demands for civil rights. The struggle had to move on to challenge the very basis of the state itself.

But Adams and the Sinn Fein leadership did not just oppose the Orange State. They denounced Protestant workers as 'a labour aristocracy' and opposed any focus on organising in the trade unions. Adams claimed that 'the members of the republican movement in the Six Counties were mostly Catholics, who if they had jobs, had mostly unskilled ones, and who had little or no meaningful access to the trade unions.'

The description of Protestant workers as a 'labour aristocracy' was wrong even in the 1970s. Their wages were lower than their counterparts in Britain and they suffered increased job insecurity precisely because sectarianism weakened the unions. But thirty years on it makes even less sense as the heartland of manufacturing industry is being ripped out and replaced by low paid jobs in the services industry.

The dismissal of Protestant workers – and the trade union movement more generally in the North – led to one of Adams key innovations in republican thinking. If Protestants were a reactionary group in society, then the solution to the national question lay in a strategy which pushed the British government into

playing 'an influential role in persuading members of the unionist tradition that their best interests lie with the rest of the Irish people in building a new all-Irish society.'

Over the years the methods for persuading Britain to adopt this role have shifted from the armalite to constructing a nationalist consensus. Any form of workers' unity from below between Catholic and Protestant workers is dismissed as utopian. Yet ironically there is supposed to be nothing utopian about convincing the old imperialist power – eventually and after some pressure – to play a progressive role. The core of Adams' outlook has been a desire for change from above and a dismissal of the creative potential of workers in mass struggle.

Another important strand in his thought has been a version of James Connolly that was handed down by the Communist Party writer Desmond Greaves. According to Adams 'Connolly held that the nationalist revolution was the prerequisite of the socialist revolution'. He attacked the 'ultra left view which breaks up the unity of the national independence movement by putting forward 'socialist' demands that have no possibility of being achieved until real independence is won'. National independence was required because the North was a direct colony of Britain and the South was a neo-colony.

This is a distortion of Connolly's politics. He never opposed raising socialist demands in order to keep intact the unity of the national independence movement. Quite the contrary. He vigorously attacked "the cry for a union of classes" which he saw as "an insidious move on the part of our Irish master class to have the powers of government transferred from the hands of the English capitalist government into the hands of an Irish capitalist government" and as a means of getting the Irish worker "to abandon all hopes of bettering his own position".

Moreover, the idea that the Southern State is a neo-colonial state that is beholden to Britain and does not advance the interests of its local capitalists is absurd. However leaving this aside, important consequences flow from Adams' 'stages' approach.

If socialism is off the agenda then all that is on offer to Protestant workers, Northern or Southern workers is 'an island economy'. An 'island economy' was a term coined by George Quigley, the former head of the Ulster Bank to indicate a willingness to restructure Irish capitalism on a 32 county basis. Sinn Fein have taken up this theme to argue that the lot of workers would improve if there was an integrated capitalist economy with a wider home market and a stronger indigenous industry. The quest for economic integration has even led them to call for a reduction of Corporation Profits Tax in the North to the 12.5% level that pertains in the South!

Does this offer any solution to the situation in Northern Ireland? No worker gains when Martin McGuinness, in his capacity as Minister for Education, privatises school buildings and hands over their running to a subsidiary company of Cement Roadstone Holdings (CRH), the main backer of Charles Haughey's Ansbacher account. The introduction of Southern capital to Northern Ireland may help to forge new all-Ireland networks among the ruling class but it is at the expense of all workers, Catholic and Protestant, North and South.

The emphasis on the 'unity of the national independence movement' leads Sinn Fein to advocate alliances with Fianna Fail. If the party can go into coalition with the Unionist Party in Northern Ireland then obviously a coalition arrangement with FF or at

Sinn Fein will continue to
grow in the South but they
will do so as the ties of
loyalty forged through the
intense sacrifices of the
armed struggle loosen.

Privatising schools
as Minister

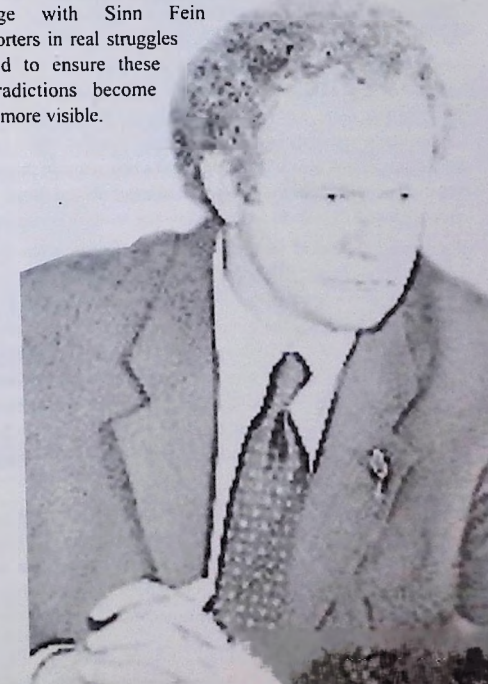
least Sinn Fein support for a Fianna Fail government is now a distinct possibility. Adams has not yet been able to sell this strategy to his own rank and file and, like the Labour Party leaders in the past, he has argued that they should not tie their hands before an election but decide matters afterwards.

The most recent development in Adams' strategy has been to seek an alliance with US imperialism. It is often claimed that this arises from strategic thinking and that the republicans are just 'using' the White House for their own ends. However, the strategic thinking shows an extraordinarily limited understanding of modern imperialism. Adams has claimed that 'with the Cold War over, Britain's value as America's principal ally against Russia is no longer relevant' and that if Irish nationalism unites, the US can be persuaded to play a progressive role in Ireland.

But far from the US adopting a more progressive role after the end of the Cold War, economic competition between the leading capitalist powers has intensified and their urge to dominate the developing world has grown. The US under both Clinton and Bush have sought to use their military power to prise open more economic opportunities for their companies. Their main ally – or, more precisely, their favourite lap dog – is Britain, as its willingness to send another 1,700 troops to Afghanistan testifies.

Far from being 'strategic', Adams' attempt to appease US imperialism – in the forlorn hope that it will pressurise Britain to adopt a pro-United Ireland policy – has brought considerable costs. He first tried to distance himself from the Columbia Three and then was pulled back into line by his own rank and file. After September 11, he issued a forthright denunciation of 'terrorism' at his party's Ard Fheis but issued no word of condemnation of Bush's war. Even when a more critical stance was adopted later, the main alternative posed was the need to use the UN as the principle vehicle for 'opposing 'terrorism'. Most recently, Adams has even stated that 'we [SF members] are very clear in terms of our recognition and acceptance and support for the Garda Síochána as the only legitimate policing service in the State'.

Sinn Fein will continue to grow in the South but they will do so as the ties of loyalty forged through the intense sacrifices of the armed struggle loosen. This means that the contradiction between support which is built on a left wing rhetoric and the clearly stated policies of the Adams leadership will grow. The role of the revolutionary left is to engage with Sinn Fein supporters in real struggles – and to ensure these contradictions become ever more visible.



CUBA: Do Workers Run Society?

In a world dominated by an increasingly belligerent American imperialism, Cuba's ability to withstand forty years of US aggression has made it a beacon of inspiration for a new generation of anti-capitalist activists emerging out of Seattle and Genoa.

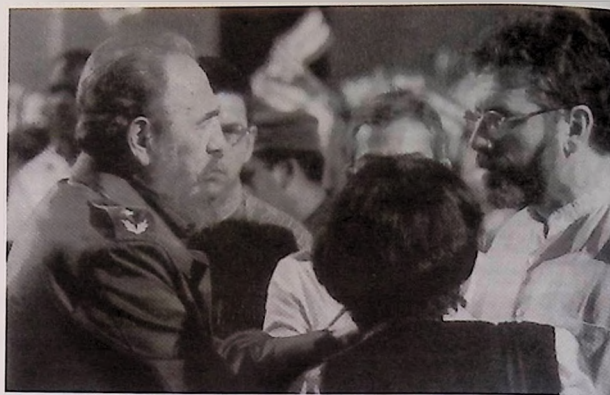
Pundits far and wide predicted Cuba's collapse after the disintegration of the Stalinist states. Its survival, and Castro's speeches against globalisation and growing inequality, suggest that perhaps Cuba represents a break with the world system. The truth is more complicated however. Not only does Cuban society today suffer from all of the same basic inequalities afflicting the rest of the world, but it is moving rapidly in the direction of more inequality. Workers have no more rights than they do in most capitalist countries and Cuban "socialism" differs in no fundamental respect from the classic Stalinist regimes of old.

The Cuban revolution of 1959 represented an important blow against US imperialism, but it was in no sense socialist. Although Castro's army had the passive support of peasants and the urban working class, they played no central role in either overthrowing Batista or in shaping the new regime. The new government, determined to break from dependence on the US, set about building a state capitalist economy that could develop industry and make the island self-sufficient, but very quickly came to terms with a new dependence on the USSR. Russian subsidy kept the economy from unravelling in the face of the American blockade, but ordinary Cubans have never known anything but severe austerity.

The situation worsened dramatically after 1989. By 1993, GDP in Cuba had fallen more than 35%, and the regime declared a "Special Period" of austerity and extended police powers. With oil supplies withdrawn, residential neighbourhoods experienced blackouts most of the day several days a week. Manual labour returned to those sections of agriculture that had been mechanised. A joke going around Havana at the time suggested that "During the Special Period, Fidel will remain Comandante but Hunger will be General." Scuffles broke out between young people and police in Havana, and a new wave of mass migration began, as tens of thousands took their chances aboard flimsy rafts in the shark-infested Florida Straits.

From the dog days of the early 1990s, the Cuban economy seems to have made a dramatic turnaround, boasting growth rates of over 5% every year since 1996. But rather than improve life for ordinary Cubans, these changes have dramatically increased inequality. The key to growth has been a massive increase in foreign investment. Upwards of \$10 billion has been invested in Cuba from abroad in recent years. Cuban officials have obliged multinational capital with reduced import tariffs and free trade zones along with industrial parks where labour laws are suspended and employers given wide latitude in setting wages and conditions.

Elsewhere in the economy, Cuban workers have no right to organise independently, and it is a crime to even enter into discussions with employers about wages and conditions. One economist noted that "foreign companies reportedly insist on safety regulations beyond those typically employed in Cuban workplaces."



Castro and Adams

Most significant, though, is the return of the tourism industry, by far the largest source of foreign investment. Incredibly, the level of tourism today is greater than it was at its height in pre-revolutionary Cuba. No tour of Cuba in the 1970s was complete without a guided visit to the "liberated" beaches and hotels, the parks and nightclubs that had been racially segregated and off limits to all but elite Cubans under the Batista regime. All of that has now returned, under the guise of what Cubans call "tourism apartheid." Everywhere one looks the gap between tourists, who have the run of the place, and ordinary Cubans who are harassed by police if they dare loiter around the posh hotels and nightclubs, is glaring.

Another consequence of tourism is a palpable rise in racial inequality. In an economy that has shifted from the Cuban peso to the dollar over the past seven or eight years, those with relations in Miami (disproportionately white) have been somewhat buffered from the worst effects of these changes. dependent on "el cheque" from family in the US to keep them above subsistence. More flagrant inequalities have emerged as well. The vast majority of those employed in the tourist industry are light-skinned. One manager in a tourist enterprise explained that while "there is no explicit policy stating that one has to be white to work in tourism, it is regulated that people must have a pleasant appearance and blacks do not have it."

Though the authorities are reluctant to admit it, unemployment in Havana is well over 30%, and thousands are reduced to peddling trinkets and fake cigars to obtain tourist dollars. Prostitution is rampant and after having almost eradicated AIDS in the mid-1980s, AIDS and other STDs are reportedly approaching epidemic levels. Over 150,000 Cubans work legally in the tourism sector under conditions that bar strikes along with any form of trade union activity, and perhaps the same number in the black market and informal sector. It is not simply the austerity that Cubans have to put up with today that opens up the possibility of a clash with the regime. They have known austerity for more than forty years, and understand more clearly than most that their predicament is the result of both imperialist aggression and the Castro regime's economic and political priorities. What makes the current situation unbearable is the flagrant inequality that has accompanied the recent turn. With enough dollars, one can buy anything in Cuba, including the latest hi-tech equipment. The number of new hotel rooms doubled between 1997 and 2000, but the regime seems to feel no such urgency about alleviating the housing shortage in a country where it is common to find two or three families huddled together in dilapidated housing. There is little left of the optimism and confidence that the revolution once inspired among ordinary Cubans; the only thing that can bring that is a new challenge to global capitalism - one that breaks the isolation imposed on Cuba by imperialism and reintegrates it into the revolt of working people around the world.

Brian Kelly

John Wayne is dead, let's get Mel Gibson...

Simon Basketter examines Hollywood's attempts to justify US wars in film

Mel Gibson's latest movie, *We Were Soldiers*, depicts the first major battle in Vietnam between the US army and the Viet Minh in 1965. Lines in the film like "I'm glad I died for America" make it a match for John Wayne's Vietnam propaganda film *The Green Berets*. It follows *Behind Enemy Lines* where the US save Bosnia, and despicable *Black Hawk Down*, where the butchering of 1,000 Somalis is presented as humanitarianism.

Ronald Raygun had *Top Gun* and *Rambo*. Bush has *Black Hawk Down* and *We Were Soldiers*. As an aside when the bombing of Afghanistan started RTE showed the first two *Rambo* movies but for some reason they omitted the third part of the series when Stallone gives up retirement in an Asian monastery (honest) to fight alongside the plucky Afghans against the evil Ruskies - sometimes yesterday's propaganda is today's political embarrassment. Anyway with the spate of pro war flicks it's tempting to say there is a conspiracy: and in a way there is.



John Wayne - *The Green Berets*

Last November 11th a powwow at the cushy Beverly Peninsula Hotel brought together four dozen of the Hollywood power elite with President Bush's top adviser, leading White House hawk Karl Rove. Their mission: to explore how the entertainment industry could assist in Operation Infinite Hypocrisy. It drew the chiefs of all the major networks and studios as well as representatives of the directors' and actors' unions. "We are already propaganda experts," according to producer Lynda Obst. "We are the veritable American Dream Machine. We hardly need any instruction from Karl Rove in this area."

Rove briefed the Hollywood executives on the message that the White House would like to stress. Instead of propaganda, the war effort needs a narrative that should be told, said a straight-faced Rove, with accuracy and honesty.

Further, from the start of the war in Afghanistan Hollywood writers and producers volunteered in droves to participate in private "brainstorming sessions" that were convened at the Institute for Creative Technologies, an Army-funded video training research centre. Those sessions, attended by John Milius, who co-wrote *Apocalypse Now*, and by a writer of *Die Hard*, among many others, tried to guess what the terrorists' next move might be.

But all this is nothing new. In the run up to America's entry into World War 2 there was a rush of left liberal films urging American entry into the war. But after Pearl Harbour, Roosevelt called in the Hollywood moguls to make propaganda movies official policy. As well as the odd bizarre musical and Abbot and Costello movie there was: *Hillbilly Blitzkrieg*, *Women in Bondage*, *The Devil with Hitler*, *I Escaped from the Gestapo*, *That Nasty Nuisance*, *Enemy of Women*, and a personal favourite *Tarzan Triumphs*.

Tarzan Triumphs runs as follows: Nazi agents parachute into Tarzan's peaceful kingdom and occupy a fortress, hoping to exploit oil and tin. A somewhat flabby Johnny Weissmuller rallies his natives (all of whom are white) against the Axis. "Kill Nazis!" Tarzan commands the natives.

They nod eagerly. The Germans are so despicable even the animals turn against them.

Japanese Americans suffered badly in America during WW2 and pretty badly in the movies too. In *Little Tokyo, U.S.A.* (1942) all people of Japanese descent were portrayed as loyal to the Emperor and capable of sabotage and treason. This film wholeheartedly advocated the internment of all Japanese-Americans. At the end of the film, when an "all-American Los Angeles police detective" named Mike Steele has broken the Japanese spy ring, he punches out the Japanese villain, proclaiming "That's for Pearl Harbour, you slant-eyed ...".



Mel Gibson - *We Were Soldiers*

John Wayne's *Green Berets* were replaced by critical movies from *MASH* (set in Korea but made in 1970 during Vietnam) to the problematic *Deer Hunter* and *Apocalypse Now*. While all these Hollywood movies about Vietnam suffered from a "White mans' burden" view of Vietnam - the trauma to America rather than the Vietnamese is almost always the focus - America's defeat produced better films.

The end of WW 2 also meant some reflection. In 1945, *The Story of G.I. Joe* had Robert Mitchum among others on the drudgery, discomfort and the terror of combat in an unsentimental story of mud, blood and death. And in 1951 *Go for broke!* the 442nd Regiment made up of Japanese Americans exhibits heroism far beyond the call of duty, overcoming the Nazis as well as the extreme prejudice of the white Americans who cannot accept "Japs" on their side. It's no *Battleship Potemkin* but in the context of what it followed it was remarkable.

And even during the WW1 in 1918 Charlie Chaplin made *Shoulder Arms* - a biting cynical satire on a soldier's lot. After the war ended a spate of serious and moving pacifist movies replaced the satire.

While as one Hollywood producer put it when asked about making movies supporting the war on terrorism: "The box office is God. And there shall be no false gods before it. Period", these precedents mean that it isn't all over yet. Brendan Sexton III is in *Black Hawk Down*. Before having a gagging order placed on him for breaching his contract he spoke at anti-war meetings to denounce the film saying the film "portrays Somalis as savages without any reason to oppose the US military presence in Somalia." He said he originally agreed to take the part because in the script his character openly denounces the military action. But, he said, "After September 11, they edited out the speech my character, Alphabet, made." "We did the same thing in Somalia as we did in Afghanistan," Sexton said. "Somalia was a piece in the game of Cold War chess."

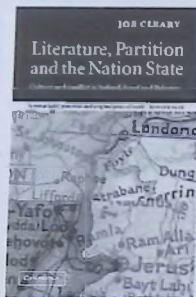
And remember even with John Wayne America lost Vietnam. And the anti-abortion bigot Mel Gibson can't stop the anti-war movement.



REVIEWS - BOOKS

Literature, Partition and the Nation State: Culture and Conflict in Ireland, Israel, and Palestine

Joe Cleary
(Cambridge University Press)
stg £15.95



Irish academic books on literature are common, however ones with a Marxist framework that take in Lenin's writing on nationalism as part of the debate are a rare commodity. Joe Cleary's new study *Literature, Partition and the Nation State: Culture and Conflict in Ireland, Israel, and Palestine* focuses on how literature is constructed and is contested in Northern Ireland and Israel/Palestine. Cleary analyses how literature is a means to support or oppose the official cultures that emerge out of partition.

He begins with a discussion of Northern Ireland: "the romance-across-the-divide" and "the troubles thriller". Cleary suggests that these genres construct "the Troubles" as an internal issue that excludes examination of broader implications and causes.

The discussion of Northern novels and films and their ability to internalise the conflict is well done. The discussion of Cal and The Crying Game give a detailed view of how both stories reflect pretty standard establishment views on the Northern conflict.

In his discussion of the novels and persona of Israeli novelist Amos Oz, a proponent of a two state solution for Palestine, Cleary argues that the novelist's critique of Israel's treatment of the Palestinians operates within narrow and conservative limits. Oz is often seen in the West as a symbol of Israeli liberalism. Cleary's deconstruction of him shows just how weak Israeli liberalism is.

The individual elements of the analysis are fine, for example his reading of Ghassan Kanafani's novel *Men in the Sun* is useful as an example of the oppression of the Palestinians as a people face as well as the contradictions of the literature within that oppression.

But, while the specific critiques are valid, the framework seems slightly flawed. While wary of criticising Cleary for

what he does not cover, the omissions are due more to a conceptual weakness than a need for brevity. Cleary criticises much literature for internalising the "Troubles" but in a way so does Cleary himself. While there is a brief discussion of India, there is no discussion of culture produced post-partition. The novels, and particularly the cinema of India and Pakistan, frequently dealt with the "carnival of reaction" of partition and would be a valid comparison.

Cleary's specific focus on the North and Palestine makes the book's theme carry more weight than it should. And it is questionable if Palestine can be seen as a matter of partition at all. Cleary himself talks of those Middle Eastern writers who come from a perspective of seeing the issue as 'colonialist'.

Further, the similarities between Northern Ireland and Israel are inadequate to the task Cleary wants to give them. Do Northern Protestants play the same role as the Israelis? Can Southern Ireland be compared to the West Bank or is the 'Irish Diaspora' equivalent to the millions of Palestinian refugees? Cleary does not argue for these absurdities but the book's big link between Ireland, Palestine, partition and culture has to deal with the differences as well as the similarities if the analysis is to be effective.

Cleary ends the book by saying that readers of novels like happy endings but that happy endings don't just happen, they have to be won. This fresh approach to a discussion of literature from an Irish academic makes the publication of Cleary's book, whatever the criticism, welcome.

Simon Basketter

Second World War: Belfast had four (yes four) air raid shelters for the whole population - made from sandbags with not one searchlight.

Such gems of information appear regularly. However they also serve to highlight a major weakness in Barton's writing - his lack of analysis. Undoubtedly his research has been immense but ultimately it lacks glue - the jigsaw pieces remain unconnected. This is not helped by portraying the history of Ulster as separate from the rest of Irish history. So the quite decisive and subjective elements leading to partition - the Dublin lockout, the Easter uprising, the War of Independence etc are mere backdrops.

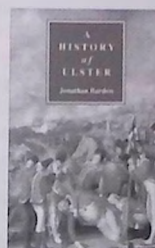
In the end, Barton's History of Ulster is an interesting chronology of events. His own explanations are few and, when they appear, infuriating. So for instance the increase in loyalist murders prior to the peace process came about because the paramilitaries had 'acquired a new set of hard-line leaders' and because the Stevens inquiry into collusion had driven informers underground which stopped the security forces receiving 'crucial sources of intelligence'.

Ultimately we, in Barton's eyes, have no control over the random events that we call history. This means that nowhere in the description of the peace process are the marvellous demonstrations of workers from Shorts, Harland and Wolff and across Belfast, who in our thousands brought the pressure that led to the ceasefires and made Northern Ireland a safe place for the likes of Bill Clinton to pay us a visit.

Mark Hewitt

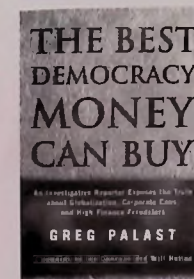
A History of Ulster

Jonathan Barton,
Blackstaff Press
stg £30



The Best Democracy Money Can Buy

Greg Palast,
Pluto Press
stg £18.99



Journalism is more often than not about retelling a press release or asking a politician a safe question that was agreed in advance. But there is another side. The journalist HJ Mencken once said "the job of journalism is to afflict the comfortable and bring comfort to the afflicted". For a number of years one surprising place in the corporate media where the comfortable are afflicted has been on the Business pages of the British newspaper the Observer. Here Greg Palast has dug up dirt on corporations, the IMF and the coup d'etat that was George Bush's presidential election. These articles and others with unpublished information are collected together in a new book: *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy*.

Palast began as an investigator, working on behalf of trade unions and consumer groups in the US, highlighting the abuse of corporate power and the destruction of people's lives and the planet. His work led to the prosecution of nuclear power plant builders for racketeering, and the revelation of how the Exxon Valdez disaster was allowed to happen because the shipping company cut costs by turning the radars off!

In this book Palast recounts how Bush stole the American election by taking thousands of black men off the electoral roll. In the end, a court ruled that Bush had won the election by 376 votes but Bush had used computer databases to knock 57,700 voters off the rolls on the basis that they were ex-convicts, who can't vote in Florida. The majority of these people had committed no crime at all, apart from being black, and black voters are overwhelmingly Democrat voters. In many cases they simply had a

When Silvio Berlusconi recently trumpeted about the superiority of Western "Civilisation" and Christianity one wonders what aspects of that civilisation he had in mind. Mark Cocker's book, *Rivers of Blood, Rivers of Gold* is a stark reminder that capitalism was built with the blood of millions on its hands. He details four examples of European colonialism where the colonialists all but destroyed the native peoples or, as in the case of the aborigines of Tasmania, these peoples were completely wiped out by disease and the colonialist's policy of extermination.

Cocker begins by examining the Spanish conquest of the Mexican (Aztec) and Inca empires. Historians have often presented this as an example of the superiority of European arms and technology, and of the military ingenuity of Hernan Cortez, the Spanish conquistador, conveniently forgetting the human carnage involved in the conquest. However, these empires were highly sophisticated and advanced societies. Tenochtitlan, the Mexican capital, is described by Cocker as one of the "greatest artefacts on Earth" and rightly so. At the time, its population stood at 225,000, greater than the combined population of Paris and London. The siege of Tenochtitlan resulted in the deaths of over 200,000 of the native population, leaving the city in ruins and a whole civilisation destroyed. It is worth noting that the Spanish hierarchy today wants to canonise Queen Isabella of Spain, the Spanish monarch who sponsored Cortez, on the grounds that she won America for Christianity!

The American West has been mythologised by Hollywood, presenting white pioneers as the innocent and heroic victims of Indian savagery. The truth couldn't be more different. The policy of successive American governments was a genocidal one that viewed the Native American population as an impediment to "progress". The native population had to make way for capitalist ranchers and mining companies. This is the view of General William Sherman: "We must act with vindictive earnestness towards the Sioux ... even to the point of their extermination". When this policy failed, American Indians were either cajoled or forcibly moved off their lands and moved on to reservations situated on the worst land.

The Amerindians did fight back. Their most famous victory was the battle of Little Bighorn when Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse routed an army of the US Seventh Cavalry under Custer.

Geronimo's bravery in resisting the US government policy of reservations has since been acknowledged even by Hollywood. Geronimo's Apachan contemporaries, Victorio and Nana also fought tenaciously against overwhelming odds. This whole episode of American history, like slavery, gives lie to Bush's claim that America has always stood for democracy and freedom.

Few today, will have heard of the struggle of the Herero and Nama tribes against German imperialism in the first decade of the last century. Yet these small tribes were to involve the Germans in a costly war in Namibia, then known as German South West Africa. European racism could not fathom that these African tribes could take on the Germans and win. Ultimately, overwhelming superiority in arms and men would give victory to the Germans but not before they had committed 15,000 men, 500 officers, 60 artillery and machine-gun units and 20,000 horses. Nevertheless, it took over a decade before the Germans finally triumphed. The result, of course, was catastrophic for the defeated, resulting in the almost complete annihilation of both tribes. By 1911, only 15,000 Herero and over 9,000 Nama were left out of a pre-war population of 80,000 and 20,000 respectively.

This book counters the many racist myths about the supposed inherent superiority of Western civilisation. Cocker doesn't idealise the societies that were conquered by Europeans, pointing out that the Mexicans for example were an extremely hierarchical society and that the Mexican Empire was built through military conquest. If there is a flaw with this book, it is that he suggests that the motivation for European conquest was racism and that all Europeans were complicit in the barbarity of the colonists. Yet the colonies were central to the development of capitalism. Spanish gold for example was central to the primitive accumulation of capital, though that gold ended up in Northern Europe where capitalism was much more dynamic than in Spain. One of the central issues of the American Civil War was whether the West would be won for the Southern slavery or the northern capitalists.

Nevertheless, the arguments and facts contained in this book are very useful for socialists and those who want to resist oppression and injustice.

Conor Keneally

name that was similar to a convicted felon. Plus there were 8,000 people disqualified for crimes committed in Texas.

The story was broadcast on the BBC but not in America, even though Palast gave CBS all the information he had uncovered in Florida. When, after four days they hadn't aired it, he rang the producer who told him the story didn't stand up. He was told that "We rang Jeb Bush's office and he said it didn't happen." Palast is critical of the Democrats for giving in to this because to fight the result would have meant tackling racism.

Palast's other great scoop revealed the IMF and World Bank's secret plan for Argentina. Palast describes the documents that fell onto his desk as the murder weapon that killed the Argentine economy. The destruction of Argentina was laid out in a series of documents. The country would be ground down to meet interest payments, which the IMF knew would cause what they called "social unrest", and that it would have to be met with, in their words, "resolve" (tanks on the street).

As a symbol of the IMF's attitude one item in the documents, under a heading called "Improving the conditions of the poor", called for a reduction in unemployment benefit from \$200 to \$160 a month.

While Palast offers no broad strategy for where to go with the information he uncovers, the book is an entertaining and powerful indictment of the system and journalism done, for once, as it should be.

James Read

Rivers of Blood, Rivers of Gold, Europe's Conflict with Tribal Peoples

Mark Cocker,
Pimlico
stg £12.50



Eamonn McCann

Even soft drugs drive political parties mad

On the same day last month as the "Lambeth Experiment" was declared a success, reports in Irish newspapers suggested that Sinn Féin in Kerry took a harder line on marijuana than the London cops.

Under the Lambeth Experiment people caught with small amounts of marijuana are cautioned and let go, rather than arrested and charged. The policy was the subject of sharp controversy when first introduced by local police commander, Brian Paddick. The Daily Mail, Sun etc. went berserk. "Top cop goes soft on drugs", and so forth.

The press pack was spurred on when it was revealed that Paddick is gay. Now it was, "Top bent cop goes soft on drugs". When his former partner told the News of the World (for £100,000) that Paddick had himself smoked cannabis, homophobic hysteria went into hyperdrive. On March 18, Paddick was removed from his post.

All the more wonder, then, that three days later the Met announced that, from the police point of view, the Lambeth Experiment had proven a success. Robbery and petty crime were down, and resentment of young people against the police was said to have diminished. Campaigners for decriminalisation saw the developments as a step forward. More enlightened attitudes were at last winning out. In south London, if not in north Kerry.

Sinn Féin's Martin Ferris seems set to take one of the three North Kerry seats in the general election. Fianna Fáil regards the prospect as highly alarming. Ferris, they keep reminding us, is a convicted gun-runner – an odd sort of objection for the FFers to bring up in Kerry, where the revered gay gun-runner Roger Casement landed in 1916. But then, historical consistency has never been Fianna Fáil's strong point.

Ferris was also alleged to have been running a vigilante service in the constituency, recovering goods stolen from local businesses and returning them to their owners. This was "usurping the role of the gardai", shrieked "justice" minister and local TD John O'Donoghue – a line of attack which proved less than devastating. A sizeable section of the electorate didn't seem outraged at the suggestion that Ferris was out prowling the constituency at night solving crimes. It was when drugs became a factor that matters threatened to get out of hand.

Just as British papers were reporting London police hailing the Lambeth Experiment as a success, Irish papers were headlining a story that Ferris and a number of colleagues had been arrested and questioned about an alleged kidnapping. The story centred on a "drugs vigilante attack" in Castleisland. A tape allegedly found in Ferris's car contained a recorded conversation with a man seemingly being held under duress and accused of possessing drugs. A call had allegedly been made from Ferris's mobile phone to a local journalist at just about the time the journalist had received a tip-off telling him where he might find a stash of drugs taken from the kidnapped man.



Martin Ferris

The implication was that Ferris and others had seized the man and taken the drugs from him, with a view to exposing him as a "drugs baron" and so earning kudos from the electorate.

Ferris denied it all, saying "As far as I'm concerned there's no tape and it's up to the gardai to explain this alleged discovery of a tape in my car".

Gerry Adams complained that Ferris was being "harassed". Sinn Féin, he said, "did not see itself as an alternative to the gardai". But, he went on, "Sinn Féin is prepared to stand by communities battling against drugs". Ferris made the same point: "Sinn Féin makes no apology for being active in opposition to drug pushers in Kerry".

Many sensible people will be prepared to believe that Ferris and Sinn Féin were being set up. Fianna Fáilers like O'Donoghue are well capable of using dirty tricks to save their political skins. Even more likely, many a senior guard will have been seething at the idea of Martin Ferris becoming a TD, and would think nothing of trying to stitch him up.

But lurking in the background was a question which none of the mainstream media seemed to regard as relevant. What drug was it, exactly, that the alleged "baron" had been dealing in? Crack cocaine? Heroin?

It was, of course, marijuana. The stuff the cops around Brixton High Road merely sniff at these days, and pass by. The substance which the Liberal Democrats, the Police Federation magazine, three British national newspapers, Vincent Browne, the governments of a number of EU states and a host of others more sensible than any of these want decriminalised without further ado.

But Sinn Féin in Kerry, and elsewhere, will have no truck with this trendy line. Apart from acting the guard in relation to stolen goods, Sinn Féin is evidently in competition with Fianna Fáil as to which is the more vigorously opposed to marijuana and as to who's doing most to keep the drug out of Kerry.

This stiff-necked line doesn't sit comfortably with Sinn Féin's self-projected image as a progressive radical party out to throw off the musty assumptions of the past. But drugs scares are widely seen as reliable vote-winners, and might deliver the preferences needed to make up a quota. That, at any rate, will have been the party strategists' calculation.

On the other hand, it could be, as some of the rest of us believe, that Kerry is at least as enlightened as Lambeth. In which case, the strategy of out-flanking Fianna Fáil for the anti-marijuana vote may not be quite the winner Sinn Féin assumes.